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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DISAFFECTED INTELLECTUAL AND SOCIETY AS SHOWN IN LORD BYRON'S MAJOR NARRATIVE POETRY

by

JIM ANDERSEN

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

It was noted that not only have critics of Byron differed on the question of what the whole of Byron's works "say," they also have been uncertain if his work, apart from Don Juan, is of lasting significance. This thesis tried to counter these approaches by showing that Don Juan deals with a theme that concerned Byron throughout his poetic career, and that a correct understanding of this theme could only be obtained by examining poems spanning his career. The specific theme under question was "the relationship between the disaffected intellectual and society." "Disaffected intellectuals" were defined as protagonists in Byron's major narrative poems who are alienated from society and become further alienated when they use their rationality to criticize social institutions and social coventions. The nature of their relationship to society is one of frustration and pain; although these intelligent men perceive flaws in society they are frustrated in their attempts to change society or even deal honourably with it. This thesis thus examined Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto I, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto III, Cain, "The Prisoner of Chillon," and Don Juan Canto I, showing that each poem uses different poetic

devices to convey a common painful relationship between the disaffected individual and society. As well, the thesis undertook to show that Don Juan Canto I differs from the other poems because it doesn't concentrate on the pain of the disaffected intellectual but rather emphasizes the arbitrary and ridiculous nature of social conventions.

For each poem the thesis first summarized the poetic devices used by Byron and second examined Byron's narrative methods. The thesis' concern with the poems' formal devices was to establish a background for the narrative form of individual poems; since it was contended that in these works Byron is depicting a similar theme through somewhat different technical and formal means, the preliminary step was to recognize the various devices Byron uses. Once having established the conventions utilized in particular poems the poems' plots were traced out, demonstrating that in each work Byron presents a consistent portrait of the disaffected intellectual.

The thesis ended with an examination of Don Juan Canto I. This examination suggested that in Don Juan Canto I Byron manages to go beyond the sense of frustration communicated by his other narrative works. In Don Juan

Canto I the criticism of society becomes reflective, a means of humour rather than a device for real social change. Whether the ability to laugh at society's flaws offers a real solution for dealing with society is arguable; what is clear, however, is that critical rationality, even in this instance, distances the critical individual from society, even if it is by critical laughter rather than painful "romantic" frustration and exile. In this way Don Juan Canto I both confirms and transcends the message conveyed by Byron's other major narrative works; for the disaffected intellectual social existence is made difficult if not, indeed, anguished, but at the same time artistic creation can "ease" that anguish.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

There has been a great range of critical response towards Lord Byron's poetry. Until recently, most critics have not only been uncertain what the whole of Byron's works "say," they have been uncertain if his work, apart from Don Juan, is of lasting significance. Critical response of this kind can be viewed as having primarily three different approaches. The first approach considers only part of Byron's work as valuable: Don Juan and little else. The second approach sees his work as forming a whole, but treats it as an extension of his life. This approach is attractive both because of the well-known dramatic nature of his life as well as for the undoubted fact that Byron uses much biographical material as a source for his poetry. The third approach views Byron in a twentieth-century context, treating his poetry in terms of the difficulty of behaving honourably in an "absurd" universe. However, all three approaches share a common limitation in that they assume that Byron did not have a consistent artistic concern throughout his poetic career. The first approach shows this most clearly by arguing that his lesser works have different themes than his greater works, and that whatever is worthy of study in the latter is not present in the former. The second approach, viewing Byron's poetry as more or less camouflaged parts of a continuing autobiography, denies his

work artistic integrity in denying it meaning apart from his life. The third approach, treating Byron as a nineteenth-century existentialist, is clearly anachronistic; although there may be some truth in saying that Byron rejects his time's morality, putting him completely into the framework of modern thought suggests that he reached conclusions that were beyond any inhabitant of the nineteenth century. All of these approaches have obvious limitations; an approach taken by recent critics, and one that I shall take, attempts to overcome these limitations by arguing that Byron is concerned with certain themes throughout the whole of his poetic career, and that his major concerns clearly belong in the context of those of other important nineteenth-century artists.[1]

In order to avoid the limited critical responses described above I shall consider a number of Byron's narrative poems spanning his career. Specifically I wish to demonstrate that these poems communicate a consistent view of the relationship between society and the "disaffected intellectual." By "disaffected intellectuals"I mean those individuals who are alienated from society and become further alienated when they use their rationality to criticize social institutions and social conventions. Byron's narrative poems show their protagonists trying to find or create meaning in what seems to them a meaningless social existence and generally failing. Byron's protagonists are all

intelligent individuals who can perceive flaws in society but are frustrated in their attempts to change society or even deal honourably with it. In being disaffected with society their critical insights are shown to further sever them from a contented social existence and to make them unhappy. Although it could be said that a kind of victory comes from these protagonists' refusal to submit to conventional society, Byron's poems, unlike the works of many twentieth-century artists,[2] do not emphasize the value of the heroic gesture but rather the undiminished strength of the forces opposing the hero. These poems all emphasize the negative nature of the disaffected intellectual's relationship with society.

Before going on to consider how his poems convey Byron's attitude about the relationship between the disaffected intellectual and society, it will be helpful to consider some comments made by Byron in conversation and correspondence which, because they exist outside the conventions of narrative poetry, provide useful examples of his views about such critical activity and help clarify his view of the character of the disaffected intellectual. In the following comment, recorded by Lady Blessington, Byron states a view of his poetry which shows an awareness of the negative aspects of social criticism:

> "It is my respect for morals that makes me so indignant against its vile substitute cant, with which I wage war, and this the goodnatured

> world chooses to consider as a sign of my wickedness. We are all the creatures of circumstance," continued Byron; "The Greater part of our errors are caused, if not excused, by events and situations over which we have had little control; the world sees the faults, but they see not what led to them; therefore I am always lenient to crimes that have brought their own punishment, while I am a little disposed to pity those who think they atone for their sins by exposing others, and add cant and hypocrisy to their catalogue of vices."[3]

The above remarks express Byron's complex response to intellectual criticism of society. On the surface they suggest a relativistic view of morality which excuses "sinning." However, the remarks also indicate Byron's awareness that society is based on "cant" -- that his forgiveness of vice and attacking of cant will incur social censure for himself. Furthermore Byron presents the social critic here as one man opposing society; this is an assessment which has inevitably to prove depressing in its recognition that the social critic is "fated" to a solitary existence. Indeed, the "crimes that have brought their own punishment" could well refer to the social pressures resulting from criticising "normal" social existence. Hypocrisy will continue because society needs to close its eyes to the arbitrary nature of social conventions and institutions. Byron knows that anyone attacking such hypocrisy risks being considered wicked by society (and, in society's terms, rightly so, since demystification is subversive of social convention).

A similar view of "cant" is communicated by Byron in a letter written to John Murray:

> The truth is, that in these days the grand "primum mobile" of England is cant; cant political, cant poetical, cant religious, cant moral; but always cant, multiplied through all the varieties of life. It is the fashion, and while it lasts will be too powerful for those who can only exist by taking the tone of the time. I say cant, because it is a thing of words without the smallest influence upon human actions; the English being no wiser, no better, and much poorer, and more divided amongst themselves, as well as far less moral, than they were before the prevalence of this verbal decorum.[4]

Byron's comment about the lack of influence of cant is, of course, untrue; if it didn't have an influence on society Byron wouldn't have felt the need to challenge it so strongly. What Byron is actually concerned with is the pernicious effect social opinion can have when it is disguised as morality. Some recent sociological theorists have echoed this insight of Byron's, and the concept of "reification" is helpful in clarifying Byron's view of cant:

> Reification is the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things, that is, in non-human or possibly superhuman terms. Another way of saying this is that reification is the apprehension of the products of human activity as if they were something other than human products -- such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will. Reification implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world . . . . The reified world is, by definition, a dehumanized world. It is experienced by man as a strange facticity, an opus alienum over which he has no control rather than as the opus proprium of his own productive activity.[5]

This definition of reification argues that society has processes to ensure that its conventions and institutions are

not perceived by individuals as man-made, but are seen as beyond human control. As his comment to Lady Blessington makes clear, Byron is similarly aware that, although cant is false and arbitrary, society needs cant to maintain itself and must hide cant's falseness. Byron's recognition of this fact inevitably leads him to conclude that social criticism constitutes the greatest threat to society and thus will draw forth the full weight of society's vengeance; this pessimistic view of the fate of such criticism and such critics will be seen as an important theme in Byron's narrative poetry and the central point I wish to demonstrate in my thesis.

Byron's comment to Lady Blessington suggests that he considers the role of the poet to be that of a critic of society and thus to be an individual who stands outside of society by the very nature of his critical attitude. In the narrative poems of importance written before Don Juan[6] poetry itself is therefore viewed pessimistically, as any intellectual activity criticizing society is. However, Don Juan serves as a kind of vindication for poetry and, by extension, for rational criticism. Don Juan presents neither a hero who can make social existence have meaning, nor a man who is able to live the existentially honourable life.[7] It is rather a poem in which the overt virtuosity of the poet signals a faith in artistic achievement which, if it does not provide an example of a moral solution to society's problems, still asserts in its artistry that human talent or

genius has a transcendent value. It can be seen that Don Juan represents a technical advance on the earlier narrative poems, and that it does so by repudiating the narrative logic they followed. In Don Juan the narrative method does not serve primarily to illustrate Don Juan's frustrated dealings with society, but rather allows the reader to laugh both at Don Juan and society. The effect of this laughter is to accomplish an indirect attack on society's failings: the poem does not show a critical individual being defeated by society's intractability but rather a passive and malleable individual able to adjust to any situation. Don Juan manages to make society's pernicious conventions seem unimportant; through humour the reader is able to maintain a distance and sense of superiority towards society's flaws. However, this repudiation of society's negative effects on the individual does not change the fact that society's flaws exist and that society resists criticism. The problem raised by earlier poems remains; intellectuals separated from society are "doomed" to feel the pain of solitude. Granted, the disaffected intellectual can produce a work of critical intelligence, of Art, which in its beauty can seem more real than the "hypocrisy and cant" of society. However, the disaffected intellectual still has to live with his knowledge of society's hypocrisies. This knowledge makes social existence seem particularly frustrating for the artist, who is by definition the individual blessed -- and cursed -- with a critical

consciousness.

The difficulty of social existence for the disaffected intellectual will be developed through a detailed treatment of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Cantos I and III[8], Cain[9], "The Prisoner of Chillon,"[10] and Don Juan Canto I. As a group they fairly represent the whole range of Byron's artistic response to society and, as well, comprise a relatively manageable and concise view of his poetic career. These poems also, while being among the most well-known by Byron, cover a seven year period in Byron's publishing career and show that he used a variety of forms to investigate the same problem. My intent throughout is to show that these poems illustrate the nature of the relationship between the disaffected intellectual and society, specifically the great pain and frustration such men feel. Don Juan Canto I, it will be seen, is a poem which manages to go beyond the sense of inevitable frustration communicated by Byron's other narrative works. However, in Don Juan Canto I the criticism of society becomes reflective, a means of humour rather than a device for real social change. Whether the ability to laugh at society's flaws offers a real solution for dealing with society is arguable; what is clear however, is that critical rationality, even in this instance, still distances the critical individual from society, even if it is by critical laughter rather than painful "romantic" frustration and exile. In this way Don Juan Canto I both confirms and transcends the message conveyed by Byron's other major narrative works: for the disaffected intellectual social

existence is made difficult if not, indeed, anguished, but at the same time artistic creation can "ease" that anguish.

My treatment will first involve a brief summary of the poems' formal devices, and then an examination of their narrative methods. My concern with the poems' formal devices is to establish a background for the narrative form of individual poems; since it is my contention that in these works Byron is depicting a similar theme through somewhat different technical and formal means, the preliminary step is to recognize the various devices Byron uses. Once having established the conventions utilized in particular poems I shall trace out the poem's plot, demonstrating that in each work Byron presents a consistent portrait of the disaffected critical consciousness and the fate of that consciousness.

Before examining the individual poems, then, it is perhaps best to briefly describe the general structural organization Byron uses. All these poems focus on their protagonist's relationship with external opponents, whether the opponents are characters representing society, or are actual social institutions and conventions. In order to gain an understanding of how the conflict between the protagonists and their opponents unfolds in Byron's narrative poems it is necessary to consider the function of their plot. To this end the definition of plot in Holman's A Handbook to Literature is useful:

> [plot] usually focuses with one principal idea in

> mind-character. The most effective incidents are those which spring naturally from the given characters, the most effective plot presents struggle such as would engage these given characters, and the most effective emotion for the plot to present is that inherent in the quality of the given characters. The function of plot, from this point of view, is to translate character into action.[11]

The poems I am concerned with are dominated by their narrative structures. In this way their formal devices perform more in a "narrative" than an "affective" manner: plot, setting, narrative voice, time-framework, dialogue, language are all used to present the protagonist acting in a way which demonstrates his character. Byron does, of course, use other techniques to suggest his protagonist's character; for example he sometimes suggests a personality trait by evoking an associated symbol in nature; but the clearest evidence of character in his poems is action, or even inaction, or refusal to act, and the other elements of the poems are subordinated to their plot-as-action. This being true it can be seen that Byron's narrative techniques are not particularly complex, at least up until Don Juan Canto I. Generally he describes his character and then has the character's actions illustrate the description. Also, Byron's characters are generally static, they do not change a great deal in the poems. Since Byron's poems operate in this straightforward manner the protagonist's character can be ascertained very clearly.

In Byron's narrative poems, as the Handbook suggests, "the function of plot . . . is to transform character into action." Thus the psychological nature of he protagonist

determines the nature of the action and the manner in which the plot unfolds. In the poems I deal with there is a common assumption that the alienated individual's intelligence and talents are useless in the face of a hypocritical and repressive society. All the poems thus present such men as ineffectual as agents; their rationality is consistently defeated. The protagonists' actions reveal their psychology, a psychology which emphasizes their isolation and their limitations as agents of social change.

In the poems up to Don Juan this disaffected intellectual is viewed against a number of different backgrounds. The effect of these different settings is to confirm the overall impression, throughout Byron's œuvre, of the limitations of critical consciousness, because no matter what situation Byron's protagonists find themselves in they always demonstrate the negative results of criticism of society. In Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto I Harold is shown to despise "high society" yet his response to this dislike is not to try to live honourably in society but to flee to the continent. In Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto III the protagonist, who is "jaded with society," has a disturbing sense of the relativity of social convention which makes him search for transcendent absolutes to redeem social life for him. However, all the absolutes the protagonist of Canto III considers do not change his disillusioned view of society. In Cain the protagonist's repudiation of the uncritical acceptance of religion leads him to commit murder. In "The Prisoner of

Chillon" where, as the "Sonnet on Chillon" suggests, Byron could have presented an idealistic portrait of a man overcoming society's imprisonment, the protagonist is shown as being diminished by prison. Although society does not make the prisoner conform, his criticism of society ruins his life, and he eventually rejects the ideals for the maintaining of which society had imprisoned him. The cumulative effect of these narratives of the doubtful value of critical consciousness overpowers even the effect of Byron's poetic language which, although powerful at times, occasionally seems meaningless bravado, or what is worse, self-pitying. It is important, therefore, to recognize that Byron's famous emotional outpourings are only partially examples of simple complaining; they also show a poet trying to express the pain of social existence for these protagonists and not having the language for it. After the late eighteenth-century insistence on sentimental directness,[12] Byron's use of evocative language to express psychological and existential truth would most probably be understood by his readers, and by himself after the catharsis of writing had passed, as emotional indulgence. In other words it is next to impossible for Byron to make a truly emotional statement which doesn't seem cloying because, although he is attempting to use "old" literary devices in a "new" way, his direct expressions of emotion could all too easily be interpreted as melodrama.

With this outline of Byron's narrative structure in mind

I will now consider how individual poems diversely dramatize the situation of rational men inevitably undergoing great emotional pain because of their critical attitude toward society. In showing different protagonists suffering a common fate these narratives present a consistent and in many ways powerful impression of Byron's view of the painful nature of the relationship between such men and society.

CHAPTER II

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto I

The protagonist in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto I dislikes English "high society" and is unable to live in it; the "pilgrimage" is thus a search for some truth which will redeem society for him:

> . . . conscious Reason whisper'd to despise
> His early youth, misspent in maddest whim;
> But as he gazed on truth his aching eyes grew dim.
>
> To horse! to horse! he quits, for ever quits
> A scene of peace, though soothing to his soul:
> . . . o'er him many changing scenes must roll
> Ere toil his thirst for travel can assuage,
> Or he shall calm his breast, or learn experience sage.
> (Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto I, xxvii - xxviii)

In the above lines it can be seen that Harold's embarking on his travels is a response to his repudiation of youthful indulgence. However, the insights he gains from his travels do not have any lasting value, but prove only momentarily soothing. Indeed, the canto's plot consists of a series of incidents embodying similar responses to this need for accepting society, where Harold contemplates a foreign scene, states some abstract truth about existence or himself, and then rushes on to the next scene. Throughout, Harold is unable to learn from the things he witnesses or the perceptions he articulates. It is significant that Harold is travelling overseas because the foreign aspect of the countries he visits gives him a clear view of life in England, free both from his own involvement in the complicating sophistication of English society and from the lack of clarity which results from the

over-familiarity of English scenes. The use of travelling as a means of ascertaining truth is a simple artistic device, touching on the basic poetic effect of defamiliarization[13]. On the other hand, Canto I repudiates the value of rationality and learning from experience, because when Harold's pilgrimage reveals a "truth" to him, he cannot learn from it in any way that leads to new possibilities for moral action. The poem does not show Harold changing or progressing but just continually moving on. His critical rationality causes him to travel, but it is a search which does not seem to have a chance of reaching its goal of personal tranquillity; the pilgrimage becomes frustrated because of the inability of Harold's critical attitude towards society to be pacified or directed into appropriate action.

In assessing the formal devices used by Byron in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto I, Harold's character can be recognized as the dominant one. In the first part of the canto Harold is established as a man who is satiated and bored with English society. Byron wishes to establish a highminded purpose to Harold's travelling and the supporting artistic devices in Canto I are designed to make his boredom seem the emotions of an honourable and sensitive individual. Although it is questionable whether Byron establishes in his canto a sympathetic portrait of a man whose only alternative to the wasteful life he sees is endless travelling, the fact that Byron's description of Harold descends into statements of

emotionality is not a representation of Byron's aim but rather of his inability to find a medium to describe Harold's needs without resorting to overwrought language. Nevertheless, Byron's use of diction, verse-form, narrative voice and characterization does strive to represent a man trying to understand society and his relationship to it.

Perhaps the first characteristic of the poem which strikes the reader is Byron's use of archaic phrases:

> ...he was a shameless wight,
> Sore given to revel and ungodly glee;
> Few earthly things found favour in his sight
> Save concubines and carnal companie,
> And flaunting wassailers of high and low degree.
> (I, ii)

The above presentation of a social "rake" is notable for its ornamented language which, taken out of context, would sound rather stilted. However, in terms of Byron's intent the archaisms show him trying to establish a depth to Harold's character -- this description in older diction attempts to connect Harold with those knights of the Middle Ages who went on pilgrimages to gain wisdom and test their moral character. Similarly the fact that the poem is written in Spenserian stanzas, a form seldom used in English Literature since men of that heroic age. Harold, Byron suggests, has mysterious qualities which separate him from his decadent contemporaries, and the language of Canto I attempts to represent this mysteriousness:

> ...oft-times in his maddest mirthful mood
> Strange pangs would flash along Childe Harold's brow

> As if the memory of some deadly feud
> Or disappointed passion lurk'd below. . . .(I, viii)

Byron further implies that Harold's character has a complexity which can only be represented through the use of unusual or "poetic" diction and references:

> . . . his was not that open, artless soul
> That feels relief by bidding sorrow flow,
> Nor sought he friend to counsel or condole
> Whate'er this grief mote be, which he could not control.
> (I, viii)

Thus, rather than having Harold articulate his feelings in the first part of the canto Byron uses archaic language to suggest Harold's strange, alienated character. When I examine his characterization in more detail Byron's strategy of showing Harold's character through comparison with other people and times will be considered again. However, before analysing the nature of Harold's character it is best to consider some more of the techniques Byron uses to convey it.

Byron's use of the Spenserian stanza owes something, as noted above, to his attempts to connect Harold to the "Childe" of an earlier age. However Byron also uses the verse form for straightforward technical reasons. Holman describes the properties of the Spenserian stanza form as follows:

> This stanzaic form is notable for two qualities: the method of "tying-in" the three rimes promotes unity of effect and tightness of thought; the Alexandrine at the close adds dignity to the sweep of the form and at the same time affords an opportunity for summary and epigramatic expression which permits the line to knit up the thought of the whole stanza.[15]

The stanza form is thus notable for its complex organization, which is quite diffuse yet has a dominant endline which orders

the stanza and can give it a summary. However, according to Byron's preface to Childe Harold's Pilgrimage he valued the form for the quite different qualities of variation and freedom of mood:

> [I can] be either droll or pathetic, descriptive or sentimental, tender or satirical, as the humor strikes me; for if I mistake not, the measure which I have adapted admits equally of all these kinds of composition.

The above description could better serve as a justification for the "ottava rima" verse form used in Don Juan and Beppo; although he states here that he wants a "loose" verse form which allows him the freedom to convey drollness and satire as well as sentimentality, there is very little humour in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto I. In actual fact, it seems clear that the nature of the Spenserian stanza, with its complex organization, would not be conducive to the kind of compositional freedom that Byron says he wants. Despite the above comment, the value of the Spenserian stanza to Byron doesn't really lie in its quality of allowing him change of moods but in its ability to show the contradictory aspects of Harold's response to society as well as the fact that this complexity is an integral part of Harold's psychology; it has the potential, in its form, to allow Byron to suggest that it is natural for Harold to view life in a contradictory fashion. As Byron states later in his preface:

> [Harold] never was intended as an example, further than to show that early perversion of mind and morals leads to satiety of past pleasures and disappointment in new ones . . . .

Byron needed a verse form which could allow description of the variety of Harold's responses and still provide an epigrammatic summing-up of his nature. In this way Byron attempted to use the Spenserian stanza as both a descriptive element and an analytical psychological element. Harold is an individual who is critical towards society yet who feels an emotional need to overcome his cynicism and accept society uncritically. The paradox of his character lies in his hatred of and need for society, and through the form of the Spenserian stanza Byron can readily display the apparently contradictory aspects of his character.

Another artistic device used in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto I which shows this concern for formal options in his poems is narrative voice. As Andrew Rutherford has pointed out, there are two characters in Canto I, Byron the narrator and Harold;[16] and in the second part of Canto I the poem alternates between descriptions of what Harold sees on his pilgrimage and Byron's own meditations on scenes in Europe. However, although the narrative voice in Canto I presages and parallels the presence of the narrator in Don Juan[17] and shows some effort to "broaden" the scope of the poem, Byron makes little attempt here to use the response of the reader to an "overt" narrator to change the reader's view of Harold. In Don Juan the narrator speaks directly to the reader and then comments upon the fact that he has "violated" the limits of the narrative. This is one way in which Byron uses the

narrator in Don Juan as an artistic device, by exploiting the reader's response to the role taken by the narrator. However in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto I there is little tension between the narrator as formal device and as Byron himself. When Byron sees an opportunity to deliver some interesting comment he sees no need to connect it to the narrator or to the character of Harold. In this way the narrator functions in the poem as the textual notes do; they are alternate ways of making direct points about the lands Harold travels through without affecting the reader's response to Harold.

As I have indicated, Canto I has a simple plot: because of his critical attitude Harold is unhappy with England and needs to leave, but because of that attitude he is unable to gain from his travels, and his quest for knowledge turns into a flight from social contentment. The first part of the poem establishes Harold's disdain yet need for society and the second part of the poem shows his inability to receive any insight which will negate his alienation. Thus Harold is initially shown as a social rake:

> . . . he was a shameless wight,
> Sore given to revel and ungodly glee;
> Few earthly things found favour in his sight
> Save concubines and carnal companie,
> And flaunting wassailers of high and low degree.

As well as being depicted as an amoral individual, however, Harold is shown to be aware of his decadent existence:

> He felt the fulness of satiety:
> Then loathed he in his native land to dwell,
> Which seem'd to him more lone than Eremite's sad cell.
> (I, iv)

In this demonstration of Harold's self-loathing a definition of desire is created: it seems that desire is imagined to be pleasurable when the object of desire is being pursued, but immediately after the desire is achieved the pleasure resulting turns into ashes: "with pleasure drugg'd he almost long'd for woe,/And e'en for a change of scene would seek the shades below" (I, vi). This realization of the paradox of desire could be said to be the keynote of Harold's character. It is implicit in this conception of desire that Harold can never be happy -- if he searches for pleasure it is because he feels a lack, yet if he achieves his desire it only brings him momentary pleasure and then he feels the nausea of satiety. Harold is vaguely aware that there is something wrong in this pattern of endless emotional searching and rejection, but he isn't able to escape the cycle. This inability to deal positively with his emotional needs is confirmed in the first part of the canto when Harold is placed beside other individuals who exist contented in society.

In this part of Canto I Harold is compared to satisfied men and women; although he admires them, he also recognizes them as being innately different from himself -- the respect he feels for these individuals only heightens his pain in realizing that he can't join their society. Thus in the fifth stanza of Canto I Harold is contrasted to an unnamed loved one:

> . . . he loved but one,
> And that loved one, alas! could ne'er be his.
> Ah, happy she! to 'scape from him whose kiss
> Had been pollution unto aught so chaste;
> Who soon had left her charms for vulgar bliss . . . .
> (I, v)

It appears from the above lines that the happiness possessed by Harold's innocent loved one is an emotion Harold is incapable of sharing. There is an element of self-pity in the description of their relationship, but more significant is the fact that although Harold recognizes that he can't stay with his loved one, his response is not to alter himself but to leave and not "pollute" her. Harold chooses flight rather than seeking positive change. Similarly, at the moment of leaving England, in the section of Canto I called "Good Night", Harold's feelings are compared to the yeoman, who is shown leaving a wife who loved him:

> "Come hither, hither, my staunch yeoman,
> Why dost thou look so pale?"
> . . .
> Sir Childe, I'm not so weak;
> But thinking of an absent wife
> Will blanch a faithful cheek." (xiii,6)

Harold bids the yeoman control his grief lest he cause others pain, but Harold does not disparage the yeoman's display of emotion. Instead, he states that he won't express grief on leaving England -- not because he doesn't feel it, but because no one will miss him:

> . . . why should I for others groan,
> When none will sigh for me?
> Perchance my dog will whine in vain,
> Till fed by stranger hands;
> But long ere I come back again
> He'd tear me where he stands. (ix)

Harold thus has a view of the emotions of social life which keeps him from accepting society uncritically. Harold witnesses honest emotions he respects and even recognizes the

love of a woman he considers good, yet is unable to receive or give such feelings. It seems questionable that, if he cannot gain from the recognition of emotions he is incapable of sharing in England, he will be able to "learn" from his travels overseas. Yet, this is precisely the development of the plot of the poem after the lyric "Good Night" -- Harold searches for some insight which will redeem his satiety and remove his disaffection with society.

The remainder of Canto I is concerned with Harold's attempts to overcome his difficulties with social existence, but, as well, it has much material which has little to do directly with Harold. For example, as the notes on Childe Harold's Pilgrimage demonstrate, Byron is clearly interested in how the relatively unsophisticated societies of Greece and Albania differ from England:

> At present, like the Catholics of Ireland and the Jews throughout the world, and such other cudgelled and heterodox people, they [the Greeks] suffer all the moral and physical ill that can afflict humanity. Their life is a struggle against truth; they are vicious in their own defence. They are so unused to kindness, that when they occasionally meet with it they look upon it with suspicion . . . . (p. 205, col. 2, note)

One might wonder that, if Harold responds to these foreign societies as the above lines suggest, his response would not affect his attitude towards English society because the two societies are so different. However, it will be seen that Harold, unlike the narrator, does not consider these nations "unsophisticated" but views them as having societies

like England's. In other words, Harold views these societies with the same attitude that he had in England, and rejects life in these countries for the same reasons he rejected life in English society. The narrator's relatively open-minded response to the foreign aspect of these countries emphasizes again Harold's inability to transcend his limited view of society in general[18].

Thus the central point to be made about the presentation of Harold in the remainder of the poem is that he does not change after he leaves England; he reacts to beauty and love overseas as he did at home:

> Oh! many a time and oft, had Harold loved,
> Or dream'd he loved, since rapture is a dream;
> But now his wayward bosom was unmoved,
> For not yet had he drunk of Lethe's stream;
> And lately had he learn'd with truth to deem
> Love has no gift so grateful as his wings . . . .
> (I, lxxxii)

Apparently the extent of Harold's learning is that the greatest benefit that can be bestowed on a lover is forgetting past loves. This "philosophy" seems simply to restate the previously quoted lines which suggested that love is only desirable when being sought, and loses its pleasurableness after consummation. Harold wishes to forget the consummation in order to make love pleasurable again, but cannot. Harold is thus travelling as an observer; he is unable to participate in the events he sees around him because his travels have not lifted him out of the cycle of desire/satiety/self-loathing. In lines representing Harold musing about himself, Harold answers the question of why, although he still appreciates

female beauty, he is unable to engage in social activities:

> It is not love, it is not hate,
> Nor low Ambition's honours lost,
> That bids me loathe my present state,
> And fly from all I prized the most:
>
> It is that weariness which springs
> From all I meet, or hear, or see:
> To me no pleasure Beauty brings;
> Thine eyes have scarce a charm for me.
>
> ("To Inez", iii - iv)

The above lines reiterate the fact that all the foreign scenes of beauty in society which Harold witnesses are unable to correct his inability to achieve permanent physical and emotional satisfaction. Since the pilgrimage serves as a metaphor for learning, for achieving a reality beyond the vicissitudes of social existence, it can be seen that Harold's ability to change or learn is frustrated. His critical attitude made Harold disgusted with life in England, but on the continent he is still uncomfortable; instead of being a journey to the end of learning the pilgrimage has become travelling for travelling's sake. Yet, even as endless movement the pilgrimage does not hold out for Harold the possibility of an end to his frustration:

> What Exile from himself can flee?
> To zones though more and more remote,
> Still, still pursues, where'er I be,
> The blight of life -- the demon Thought.
>
> Yet others rapt in pleasures seem,
> And taste of all that I forsake;
> Oh! may they still of transport dream,
> And ne'er, at least like me, awake!
>
> ("To Inez", vi - vii)

Not only do these statements call into question the possibility that Harold's critical attitude can ever be pacified,

they also show Harold aware of his problem. The only solace that travelling brings Harold is the temporary one of action; at least while moving he isn't caught up in the social life of chasing pleasure. However, the consolation that such recognition gives him seems minimal at best. Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto I establishes that Harold needs to travel, but the same quality that makes him travel keeps him from gaining any saving insight from his travels. Harold is an individual who is completely disaffected from his emotional self as well as from his society. It doesn't seem likely that either feeling of alienation will ever be removed.

CHAPTER III

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto III

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto III can be seen as a long meditation by an individual who has rejected and has been rejected by society, and is searching for an understanding of the quality which has caused this alienation. The knowledge which he gains is that the quality which isolates him is his critical rationality; as long as he uses his mind and talents in a manner which is critical of society he will be separated from that society, even though he wishes to live a beneficial life in his culture. Although there are distinct biographical references in the poem, the protagonist undergoing the search is not "Byron" with all his marital problems but Byron as a representative intelligent and honourable man who, in considering the talents of Rousseau and Napoleon, is implicitly made equal to them in having the kind of abilities which make him discontented with social passivity and contentment. The canto finally suggests that the only release from the unhappiness coming from rationality used in a critical way lies in movement, whether it is physical travelling, or the "intellectual movement" represented by writing poetry. However, the solace of writing poetry is, like the solace of travelling, only helpful when the activity is happening. When a poem is finished or a journey is ended the critical individual is still left disaffected with society.

Canto III is thus an uninterrupted emotional search for

some truth or insight which will make social existence seem worthwhile, for some belief which will allow the poet-protagonist to live happily in society:

> In my youth's summer I did sing of One,
> The wandering outlaw of his own dark mind;
> Again I seize the theme, then but begun,
> And bear it with me, as the rushing wind
> Bears the cloud onwards: in that Tale I find
> The furrows of long thought, and dried-up tears,
> Which, ebbing, leave a sterile track behind
> O'er which all heavily the journeying years
> Plod the last sands of life, -- where not a flower appears. (III, iii)

As the above lines suggest, the dominant impression Byron aims for in Canto III, and the quality which differentiates it from Canto I, is the tone of emotional elevation. Although many of the conventions used in Canto I are used in Canto III, such as the verse form and metaphoric significance of travelling, Canto III transmits this heightened emotional pitch through a different use of narrative voice and a different use of the character of Harold. In Canto I Byron uses the narrative voice to deliver comments which the reader can interpret as coming from Byron himself:

> There are two central characters (in Canto I) instead of one, and they are for the most part clearly differentiated: "My reader will observe," wrote Byron in an early draft of the Preface, "that where the author speaks in his own persona he assumes a very different tone from that of 'The cheerless thing, the man without a friend,' at least, till death had deprived him of his nearest connections."[19]

This is not to say, of course, that the narrator in Canto I can be completely identified with Byron, as the narrator is an artistic device, a persona. However, there is a potential in Canto I for Harold to be distanced from Byron's own

opinions even though Byron did not emphasize the "distance" between the narrator and Harold. In Canto III however, there is nothing that could properly be described as a separate or outside narrative voice. Instead, in Canto III the narrator, whom the reader could have viewed in Canto I as representing many of Byron's own opinions, has become the protagonist in the poem. Harold only functions as a kind of mirror of this poet-protagonist. Harold is a persona used, to some extent, to externalize Byron's own experience, an alternate method of dramatizing the extent of his emotional need. The central character in Canto III thus is "Byron," not the Byron of infamous marital difficulties and sexual indiscretions, but the Byron representing all honourable men searching for truth. To put the difference between the two cantos another way, Canto I placed the blame for Harold's inability to accept society on Harold himself, on his past decadence and present frustrated psychology. In Canto I the narrator implicitly, if vaguely, suggests another way for Harold to view foreign societies -- instead of seeing echoes of his youthful passions he could, say, have appreciated the exoticness of the scenes. In Canto III there is no alternate judgement that can be applied to the protagonist -- he, like the other men mentioned, is haunted by the paradoxical nature of greatness and the poem confirms the inevitable pain which comes to any man who aspires to greatness in society.

It should be noted that there are biographical references in Canto III which make it difficult to establish who the

"Byron" in the poem is. For example, the canto opens with a clear allusion to his daughter Ada:

> When last I saw thy young blue eyes they smiled
> And then we parted -- not as now we part,
> But with a hope. (III, i)

Such a reference tends to sensationalize the protagonist's emotions and, indeed, at times throughout the poem Byron's depiction of pain seems melodramatic and self-pitying. As always in the poems written before Don Juan, or at least before Beppo, Byron suffered from an imprecision in expressing emotion. Thus the main problem in dealing with Canto III lies not in Byron's using personal experiences, but in his being unable to transform them successfully into statements which can be treated as being part of his work's form, and not primarily read in terms of the famous incidents in his life. However, despite this difficulty, it is clear that Canto III is best understood as presenting the disaffected intellectual's problems with social existence, regardless of the reason for this disaffection. In this way the formal organization of the canto shows Byron attempting to use part of his reputation to give the poem emotional weight.[20]

The beginning of Canto III is an invocation to his daughter wherein Byron expresses the heartfelt desire to see her again:

> When last I saw thy young blue eyes they smiled,
> And then we parted, -- not as now we part,
> But with a hope. --
> Awaking with a start,
> The waters heave around me; and on high
> The winds lift up their voices. . . . (III, i)

Byron's fate seems sealed; the hope of seeing his daughter occurs in a dream and when he wakes it is to the reality of leaving the country where she lives. This poignant and fatalistic opening creates a context for Byron's misery for the rest of the poem, even though his daughter isn't mentioned again until the end of the poem. Stanzas II - VII describe Byron's character directly and stanzas VIII - XVI describe Harold's character in such a way as to extend the depiction of Byron. Harold's presence in the poem makes Byron's problem seem broader than just a concern over his daughter; the two characters come to represent all men who are disillusioned with society. The description of Byron shows that he desires an escape from the misery which haunts him; the only solution to his pain now being stoical acceptance:

> My springs of life were poison'd. 'Tis too late!
> Yet am I changed; though still enough the same
> In strength to bear what time cannot abate,
> And feed on bitter fruits without accusing Fate.
> (III, vii)

From these comments about himself Byron shifts to Harold, taking up a different subject to allow him to ease his self-accusation: "Something too much of this: -- but now 'tis past/ And the spell closes with its silent seal,/ Long absent HAROLD re-appears at last." Yet the description of Harold shows clearly that he suffers from a kind of emotional pain similar to Byron's:

> . . . Time, who changes all, had alter'd him (Harold)
> In soul and aspect as in age: years steal
> Fire from the mind as vigour from the limb;
> And life's enchanted cup but sparkles near the brim.

> His had been quaff'd too quickly, and he found
> The dregs were wormwood; but he fill'd again,
> And from a purer fount, on holier ground,
> And deem'd its spring perpetual; but in vain!
> Still round him clung invisibly a chain
> Which gall'd for ever, fettering though unseen
> And heavy though it clank'd not . . .
>
> (III, viii - ix)

The above very pessimistic lines make experience seem inevitably painful. Indeed, they describe the fatalism of a character who has recognized truth but is unable to learn from it. Life is presented as a cup of liquid which, implicitly, is not pleasurable when one can see beyond the surface. Thus, after satisfying his desire Harold finds the "dregs" of pleasure to be "wormwood." In Canto II of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Harold had tried to gain a lasting idealism from Greece's glory: this is the reference in the above lines to "holier ground." Harold found the ideal exemplified by Greece to be admirable but he also found that there was a quality in him which resisted the ennobling effect of this ideal and wore him down to earth. Although Harold recognizes ideals which appeal to him outside of society he is too sophisticated not to be drawn to the attractions in society:

> But who can view the ripen'd rose, nor seek to wear it?
> . . .
> Who can contemplate Fame through clouds unfold
> The star which rises o'er steep, nor climb?
>
> (III, xi)

Although Harold is jaded from the pleasures of social existence, the above suggests that he cannot withdraw from society. The only "solution" from Harold's dilemma is a kind of stoicism in which, if he still engages in activities which he knows contain the seeds of great unhappiness, he seeks not to be

dominated by the gloom or thrill of desire:

> Self-exiled Harold wanders forth again,
> With nought of hope left, but with less of gloom;
> The very knowledge that he lived in vain,
> That all was over on this side the tomb,
> Had made Despair a smilingness assume . . . .
> (III, xvi)

A comparison of the above lines to those of stanza vii, "still enough the same/In strength to bear what time cannot abate/And feed on bitter fruits without accusing Fate," makes Harold's and Byron's need identical. Although it would appear from their cynicism and stoical acceptance of pain and despair that they had given up on the possibility of living happily in society, the rest of the poem shows Byron's search for some absolute truth which will redeem social existence for him. His pilgrimage becomes both travel for the sake of endless movement as well as a search for meaning in the sites he visits in Europe.

Byron's pilgrimage brings him to a consideration of human greatness; he draws conclusions regarding social existence from the great sites he ponders as from the great men's lives he considers. The first admirable man Byron meditates upon is Captain Howard, a soldier who gave his life honourably at Waterloo:

> I turn'd to thee, to thousands, of whom each
> And one as all a ghastly gap did make
> In his own kind and kindred, whom to teach
> Forgetfulness were mercy for their sake;
> The Archangel's trump, not Glory's, must awake
> Those whom they thirst for; though the sound of Fame
> May for a moment soothe, it cannot slake
> The fever of vain longing, and the name
> So honour'd but assumes a stronger, bitterer claim.
> (III, xxxi)

Byron comes to Waterloo like a worshipper approaching Delphi; he wishes to know what Mankind has learned from the great event, and what men can learn from the sacrifice of individuals. It is to be noted that Byron doesn't have any overt political bias, he considers the event which occured significant not because it stopped Napoleon but because it represents a great moment in world history. A similar use of Waterloo as a reference point for understanding the importance of great events on individuals which is useful to consider occurs in Stendhal's La Chartreuse de Parme published in 1839. This novel traces the life of Fabrizio del Dongo, a passive individual somewhat like Byron's Don Juan, whose history Stendhal uses to provide a satirical view of society. Although the majority of the novel is concerned with Fabrizio's escapades in Parma, Stendhal has his protagonist fight for Napoleon at Waterloo. Fabrizio's military adventures are farcical as he makes a very poor soldier, but the reasons he gives for fighting are significant in understanding his character:

> "I will cross Switzerland with the speed of an eagle and I will go to offer that great man [Napoleon] a very little thing, but after all, the only thing I have to offer, the support of my feeble arm" . . . "I, too," I said to myself, "the as yet unknown son of that unhappy mother, I will go forth to conquer or to die beside that Man of Destiny, who sought to cleanse us from the scorn that is heaped upon us by even the most enslaved and the vilest among the inhabitants of Europe."[21]

Stendhal, like Byron, did not consider Napoleon the savior of Europe. However, he does recognize that Waterloo dominated the minds and attitudes of Europeans. Stendhal knows, as

Byron does, that to examine the life of a European living at this time one has to come to terms with the importance of the Napoleonic Wars. Stendhal uses the event of Waterloo to show, among other things, Fabrizio's sense of honour and love of freedom, but Byron uses it to convey the bitter lesson that fame and honour are only temporarily satisfying, that the lasting result of such honourable sacrifice is to cause pain and longing. To Byron it seems that honour merely intensifies the sense of loss: "the name/So honoured assumes a stronger, bitterer claim." Indeed, Byron feels that the despair resulting from the death of great men somehow gives life its significance:

> . . . for it were
> As nothing did we die; but Life will suit
> Itself to Sorrow's most detested fruit,
> Like to the apples on the Dead Sea's shore,
> All ashes to the taste . . . . (III, xxxiv)

Byron's experience of life and view of the meaning of Waterloo teaches him that what is real in life is associated with pain, because the only surcease of pain lies in death. This extreme conclusion is different from the message that Stendhal communicates with his use of the event, but both writers can be seen to consider Waterloo as a telling incident in men's lives. Byron goes on to extend this pessimistic meditation on the nature of death by considering the man at the centre of the masses gathered at Waterloo: Napoleon.

Napoleon represents to Byron a man who contains in his being the power which sets huge historical forces in motion;

characteristically, Byron's concern is with the effect of this power on Napoleon himself:

> But quiet to quick bosoms is a hell,
> And there hath been thy bane; there is a fire
> And motion of the soul which will not dwell
> In its own narrow being, but aspire
> Beyond the fitting medium of desire;
> And, but once kindled, quenchless evermore,
> Preys upon high adventure nor can tire
> Of aught but rest; a fever at the core,
> Fatal to him who bears, to all who ever bore.
>
> This makes the madmen who have made men mad
> By their contagion . . . . (III, xlii - xliii)

The quality which has made Napoleon great and lifted him above the level of ordinary men is identified as a self-destructive flame, a disease which makes him dangerous to other men, as well as to himself. Inevitably, it seems that the spark of greatness in Napoleon is going to cause him unhappiness; it cannot rest without consuming itself. In reaching this understanding of the nature of great men Byron might well have been influenced by Voltaire's The History of Charles XII which contains a similarly ambivalent reaction to the qualities which separate a conqueror from normal men:

> Thus fell Charles XII King of Sweden, at the age of thirty-six years and a half, after having experienced all the grandeur of prosperity, and all the hardships of adversity, without being either softened by the one, or the least disturbed by the other . . . . Perhaps he was the only man, most certainly he was the only king, that ever lived without failings. He carried all the virtues to such an excess as renders them no less dangerous than the opposite vices . . . . His great qualities, any one of which would have been sufficient to immortalize another prince proved pernicious to his country.[22]

However, it can be seen that Byron's view of such greatness differs somewhat from the view presented in the above passage.

To Voltaire the quality which makes Charles XII great is unfortunately not controlled by a sufficiently philosophic outlook:

> I greatly prefer to [Charles XII] . . . a prince who regards humanity as the chief virtue, who never has recourse to war but through absolute necessity, who loves peace because he loves mankind, who encourages all the arts, and who, in one word, though a king, endeavors to act like a philosopher.[23]

To Byron though, Napoleon's greatness cannot be tamed without destroying it. The genius of Napoleon is fatally flawed by its very nature as genius. This conviction of the almost suicidal nature of such men's talents is further conveyed by Byron's examination of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Rousseau is another man whom Byron admires, but it is an admiration which is, again, qualified by Byron's awareness of the price Rousseau pays for his quality of greatness:

> . . . the self-torturing sophist, wild Rousseau,
> The apostle of affliction, he who threw
> Enchantment over passion, and from woe
> Wrung overwhelming eloquence, first drew
> The breath which made him wretched;
> . . .
> His love was passion's essence: --
> As a tree on fire by lightning, with ethereal flame
> Kindled he was, and blasted; for to be
> Thus, and enamour'd, were in him the same.
> (III, lxxvii - lxxviii)

The imagery of the above echoes the fire images used in the description of Napoleon, and to the same end. Rousseau is struck down, for his emotional sensitivity is such that he is "blasted." Rousseau is the "apostle of affliction," a phrase suggesting religious sacrifice; Byron seems to be saying that Rousseau has chosen extreme emotional pain in order to reach such heights. In the next stanza Rousseau is contrasted to

those individuals who never know the pain that Rousseau feels, just as they never feel the intensity of his love:

> . . . to that gentle touch through brain and breast
> Flash'd the thrill'd spirit's love-devouring heat;
> In that absorbing sigh perchance more blest
> Than vulgar minds may be with all they seek possest.
> (III, lxxix)

Rousseau is willing to take suffering with love, a choice that most people would be unwilling to make. Clearly the individual who chooses not to live as "normal" men has to be willing to accept great pain; Rousseau's portrait makes pain seem an intrinsic part of his extraordinary quality.

After his consideration of great men Byron turns to another kind of ideal: the beauty of nature, which offers to Byron a vision not supplied by social existence:

> And when, at length, the mind shall be all free
> From what it hates in this degraded form,
> Reft of its carnal life, save what shall be
> Existent happier in the fly and worm, --
> When elements to elements conform,
> And dust is as it should be, shall I not
> Feel all I see, less dazzling, but more warm?
> The bodiless thought? the Spirit of each spot?
> Of which, even now, I share at times the immortal lot?
> (III, lxxiv)

Byron's love of nature here comprises a kind of vague pantheism which is completely separate from social life. Given this separation it is unlikely that this ideal could be reconciled with "normal" social existence. Indeed, it seems that the only way to reach this "immortal lot" is through death. The ideal Byron finds in nature is, like the transcendent ideal exemplified by Napoleon and Rousseau, severely limited.

Contemplation of great men, and the vision contained within nature, then, does not ease Byron's emotional pain, but

rather shows that such pain is inevitable if one tries to live an extraordinary life. The final demonstration of the negative aspect of the disaffected individual's response to society comes from Byron's comments about poetry in Canto III. Byron's comments are significant because they show him considering the purpose of artistic creation. In an earlier letter to Annabella Milbanke, Byron states his belief that poetry is of secondary importance to great events, that it comments about truth rather than creating it.

> I by no means rank poetry or poets high in the scale of intellect. This may look like affectation but it is my real opinion. It is the lava of the imagination whose eruption prevents an earthquake. They say poets never or rarely go mad. Cowper and Collins are instances to the contrary (but Cowper was not a poet). It is, however, to be remarked that they rarely do, but are generally so near it that I cannot help thinking rhyme is so far useful in anticipating and preventing this disorder. I prefer the talents of action -- of war, or the senate, or even of science, -- to all the speculations of those mere dreamers of another existence (I don't mean religiously but fancifully) and speculators of this apathy.[24]

Despite this denigration of poetry Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto III is written in the knowledge that great men and events haven't managed to console his painful existence. Although he finds no permanent value issuing from the poetic act, the emotional release during the moment of writing is the only kind of benefit he has demonstrated which any critical activity provides for the disaffected intellectual. The fact that Byron needs to explain in Canto III to the reader, and perhaps to himself, why he is writing the poem shows that its "truths" are not self-evident. Byron takes what satis-

faction he can from his poetry and it seems that all he can achieve is the temporary respite of writing itself. The connection with his travelling is unmistakeable; his poetry writing is an activity without a greater purpose. Byron's poetry, like the pilgrimage, will be seen to be valuable to him only during the moment of action.

The first overt mention Byron makes of his poetry comes when he discusses taking up the poetic theme he had in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto I and II:

> In my youth's summer I did sing of One,
> The wandering outlaw of his own dark mind;
> . . . it may be, that in vain
> I would essay as I have sung to sing.
> Yet, though a dreary strain, to this I cling;
> So that it wean from me the weary dream
> Of selfish grief or gladness -- so it fling
> Forgetfulness around me -- it shall seem
> To me, though to none else, a not ungrateful theme.
> (III, iii - iv)

All Byron apparently wants here is a suspension of the emotions of daily social existence: "the weary dream/Of selfish grief or gladness." Byron has focused on the moment of creation: somehow in writing, in entering into the state requisite for creating, his life seems dream-like and he attains a suspension of his emotional pain. Yet, as he reasons later in the canto, he can't create beauty which can transcend the painful insights he has recorded:

> Could I embody and unbosom now
> That which is most within me, -- could I wreak
> My thoughts upon expression, and thus throw
> Soul, heart, mind, passions, feelings, strong or weak,
> All that I would have sought, and all that I seek,
> Bear, know, feel, and yet breathe -- into one word,
> And that word were Lightning, I would speak;
> But as it is, I live and die unheard,

> With a most voiceless thought, sheathing it as a sword.
> (III, xcvii)

This stanza presages Byron's "wish" in the canto that somewhere there are "words which are things, hopes which will not deceive,/And virtues which are merciful." In this way his poetry searches for absolutes, he wishes it to redeem reality; but he knows that it cannot. However, the comment about the sheathed sword suggests that he has to use his poetic gift, for not to use it is to squander his talent. As John Hodson says:

> . . . poetry, like other quests in Childe Harold III, is a self-contradicting, self-defeating desire. Significantly, Byron renounces the Rousseauvian course, that of speaking the lightning, as unacceptably fatal. But his apparent alternative -- to sheathe his poetic sword, to remain silent -- is equally fatal to poetry.[25]

The final message of Canto III is thus that he has to use his poetic talent to create an ideal in the world, even though he knows that he will fail. Clearly poetry, like the other honourable critical activities mentioned in the poem, carries within it the seeds of self-destruction; to examine society critically is to fight an unbeatable adversary:

> Thus far have I proceeded in a theme
> Renew'd with no kind auspices: - to feel
> We are not what we have been, and to deem
> We are not what we should be, and to steel
> The heart against itself; and to conceal,
> With a proud caution, love, or hate, or aught, -
> Passion or feeling, purpose, grief or zeal, -
> Which is the tyrant spirit of our thought,
> It is a stern task of soul: - No matter, - it is taught.
> (III, cxi)

His poetry, like all considerations of the reality beyond social convention is ineffectual; society remains unchanged.

At this point the canto returns to its initial concern: answering Byron's emotional needs. It seems that he is tired of hypocrisy, tired of the pretense which social conformity hides. His poetry, he suggests, may not make ideals real, may not even convince others, but it will confirm him in his difference from others. It thus also confirms that he has a need which issues from his uniqueness:

> Fame is the thirst of youth, but I am not
> So young as to regard men's frown or smile,
> As loss or guerdon of a glorious lot;
> I stood and stand alone, -- remember'd or forgot.
> (III, cxii)

Although Byron's claim not to need an audience seems arguable, what is more significant is his assertion that all that remains to him, all that distinguishes him is his self-hood, his essence as a person willing to question society. Although he is adamant in his acceptance of his fate it remains true that his critical rationality, and his need to write poetry, prevent him from living as other men do -- in a world of illusion and cant, but in a world of more contentment.

CHAPTER IV

Cain and "The Prisoner of Chillon"

The protagonists in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Cantos I and III are, as shown, men who are obviously and deliberately different from "normal" individuals in society. The examples of Harold and Byron establish that although the disaffected intellectual can reject the hypocrisy and delusions that are part of social existence, such an individual also needs to live in society; Harold and Byron do not leave their society willingly but only because their critical awareness compels them to do so; the result is great emotional and moral suffering. The paradox that such individuals both disdain and need society is further demonstrated in the poems Cain and "The Prisoner of Chillon." These two poems show honourable and intelligent men dominated by their critical attitudes to society and finally being destroyed by them -- not just destroyed by society's revenge, but also destroyed because the protagonists in these two poems cannot live happily in a society they perceive as flawed and "unnatural". Byron does not suggest that the protagonists in Cain and "the Prisoner of Chillon" are mistaken in criticizing society, because their perceptions are shown to be accurate. Rather, both protagonists fail in changing society and thus feel frustration and pain on account of their critical response to the injustices and problems they see.

Cain

The story of Cain, as Byron of course knows, functions in the Bible as an illustration of the effects of mankind's original sin being visited upon the generation after Adam and Eve. On the surface Byron's concern with the story is quite different; rather than wishing to stress man's proclivity towards sinning, he seems concerned with exploring the psychological pressures which could motivate a man to kill his brother. The story thus dramatises the conflict between the free-thinking Cain and the authoritarian, concretized Christianity accepted by Cain's society. (It is to be noted that Byron ignores the New Testament in his Preface and just deals with the Old Testament.) Byron makes Cain's act seem understandable, even inevitable given the quality of Cain's critical stance. Byron shows Cain making a mistake, but it is a mistake issuing from his desire to learn truth and his inability to accept dogma. There is little dramatic tension in Byron's Cain, not only because the reader knows how the story ends, but because Cain's character doesn't change much in the poem, he merely becomes more determined in his doubt of God's goodness. The tension in the play instead comes from the fact that Cain, the individual who is most concerned with the meaning of death, is the one who commits murder. Byron's poem thus comes curiously close to having an "Old Testament" view in suggesting that questioning God's rightness inevitably leads to unhappiness, however not because of man's predelection to sin but because of the isolating and frustrating

effect of a critical attitude. It is in this way that the form of the poem becomes significant; in the "morality play" convention, which Cain clearly alludes to,[26] the protagonist, although perhaps fighting opponents in society, always has a group or "society" in society to which he belongs. In Byron's Cain however, the protagonist stands alone in his opposition to the dictatorial commands of religious authority. As the reader would expect from this changed presentation of the morality play's protagonist, the fact that Cain has no "external" belief but rather a faith in his own rationality causes him great pain as it severs him from society. To put it another way, instead of showing man's inherently evil nature coming from original sin, as the morality play traditionally would have used the Cain story, Byron makes the question of evil seem extremely complicated. Cain sins in Byron's poem, and pays for his sin, but it is an ironic sin. The "sin" of Cain lies not just in killing Abel but in not accepting unquestioningly the religion of his father. And the punishment of that sin lies not in going to Hell but in being separated from his society by his critical attitude, a kind of extra-social hell.

Byron's artistic aim in Cain thus requires a plot wherein characters can act according to their intellectual beliefs; after articulating a belief Cain's characters proceed to act in a manner consistent with their articulation. Cain opens with a monologue which shows that Cain has within him the seeds of a deadly frustration:

Cain.

And this is
Life! -- Toil! and wherefore should I toil? -- because
My father could not keep his place in Eden.
What had I done in this? -- I was unborn:
I sought not to be born; nor love the state
To which that birth has brought me. Why did he
Yield to the serpent and the woman? Or,
Yielding, why suffer? What was there in this?
The tree was planted, and why not for him?
. . . They have but
One answer to all questions, "'Twas his will
And he is good," How know I that? Because
He is all-powerful, must all-good, too, follow?
I judge but by the fruits -- and they are bitter . . . .
(I, i, 64 - 77)

The above, very powerful lines show a man who can excuse the act of Adam and Eve, a man who is dominated by his rationality and will only be satisfied on the grounds of rational argument. From this point in the play until the murder the play's action consists of a development of the implications in the above intellectual position; Cain becomes galled to a level of frustration where he commits murder. In this way the plot exists not as a conflict of characters but as a kind of internal argument; the characters other than Cain do not function as individual people so much as articulate views which develop that rational process in Cain's mind. On this level the characters of Lucifer, Adah and Abel merely personify different aspects of the effect of religious faith. A consideration of these characters' roles in the play underscores again the dilemma which Cain faces as an exponent of critical thought; in refusing to submit his intellectual beliefs to a higher authority he takes the honourable path but the less pleasant one.

Lucifer functions in the play as a representation of what Cain believes in, but he gives those ideas the authority of an individual who has the experience of fighting God through eternity. Lucifer is not, of course, painted entirely favourably as he is shown contributing greatly to Man's ills. However, he is described as a rebel, one who has accepted honourable pain in lieu of surrendering his independence, and whatever negativity is attributed to him does not diminish the admirable quality of his rebellion:

> Lucifer.
> One good gift has the fatal apple given --
> Your reason: -- let it not be over-sway'd
> By tyrannous threats to force you into faith
> 'Gainst all external sense and inward feeling:
> Think and endure, -- and form an inner world
> In your own bosom -- where the outward fails . . . .
> (II, ii, 459 - 464)

Lucifer speaks as the chief enemy of God; the doubt of God he encourages is honourable because it is based on man's reason and own resources. However, the above portrait of a spiritual war puts all the power on the side of God. Clearly, refusing to submit to such an authority causes much pain: "'Gainst all external sense and inward feeling:/Think and endure . . . ."

Adah represents the value of true belief in the poem, she loves Cain as much as she worships God, and when Cain sins she is the only one to stand beside him. Adah thus demonstrates the best counter-argument to Cain (besides the fact that his refutation of faith led to murder):

> Adah.
> A dreary, and an early doom, my brother,
> Has been thy lot! Of all who mourn for thee,

I alone must not weep. My office is
Henceforth to dry up my tears, and not to shed them;
But yet of all who mourn, none mourn like me,
Not only for thyself, but for him who slew thee.
Now, Cain! I will divide thy burden with thee.
(III, i, 544 - 550)

Adah is all mercy; although she feels Abel's loss greatly she loves Cain uncritically and has the strength to forgive his sin. It can be recognized that Cain loves Adah, but is unable to follow her example:

Adah. Oh, Cain! choose love.
Cain. For thee, my Adah, I choose not -- it was
Born with me -- but I love nought else.
(I, i, 427 - 430)

Although Adah represents good it is a good which Cain could only attain by denying the powers of his mind. And that is a sacrifice Cain is unwilling to make.

After talking and arguing with Adah and Lucifer, Cain reaches the conclusion that worshipping God would involve the submission of his critical rationality. It can be seen that this belief causes Cain a great deal of frustration because, by extension, anyone who accepts God without enquiry seems to Cain to lack moral courage, and it is hard for him to respect such cowardice. Cain thus brings to his sacrifice not faith, but a belligerent attitude -- he demands that God explain himself:

Cain. If a shrine without victim,
And altar without gore, may win thy favour,
Look on it! and for him who dresseth it,
He is -- such as thou mad'st him; and seeks nothing
Which must be won by kneeling: if he's evil,
Strike him! Thou art omnipotent and may'st --
For what can he oppose?
(III, i, 266 - 272)

When God refuses his less than wholehearted sacrifice Cain seeks to tear down Abel's sacrifice and when Abel resists he strikes Abel down. Abel's sin, to Cain, is that he is unwilling to listen, unwilling to examine his faith in God, declaring "Sole Lord of Light!/Of good and glory, and eternity;/Nothing can err, except to some good end." Abel's vision of God is precisely what Cain despises: unquestioning worship. It is ironic that Cain strikes Abel down because Cain himself refused to slaughter an innocent lamb; Abel represents to Cain a belief which is capable of doing anything for God, yet Cain is the one that murders. Cain's rationality does not protect him from fanaticism but, instead, because of the frustration it creates in isolating him from his society, causes Cain to behave irrationally. Byron's presentation of the murder of Abel does not excuse Cain so much as to show how frustrating and potentially dangerous the effects of critical rationality can be.

Throughout the play there is a powerful impression of inevitability -- that Cain is powerless in evading his fate or making any other choice than killing Abel. This impression is first suggested by Lucifer's foreknowledge:

> Lucifer: First born of the first man!
> Thy present state of sin, and thou art evil --
> Of sorrow, and thou sufferest -- are both Eden
> In all its innocence compared to what
> Thou shortly may'st be . . . .
> (II, ii, 219 - 223)

This suggestion is then echoed in Eve's curse on Cain, which implies that as he was fated to murder Abel so will he

represent murder to the coming generations:

> Eve. . . . the will of yon incarnate spirit
> Of death, whom I have brought upon the earth
> To strew it with the dead.
> . . .
> Hence fratricide! henceforth that word is Cain
> Through all the coming myriads of mankind . . . .
> (III, i, 419 - 439)

Eve connects Cain's act with her sin, and forecasts a continuance of sinning in the future. In this way it appears that mankind's sins issue from the original one of Eve and that Cain's fate was determined from the moment of her fall. The significance of these hints of inevitablility and foreknowledge is that they bring into question the validity of moral choice. If God is omnipotent how can man have free choice? And if man does not have free choice existence becomes, indeed, oppressive and rationality becomes pointless:

> Adah. What is the sin which is not
> Sin in itself? Can circumstance make sin
> Or virtue? -- If it doth, we are the slaves
> Of -- . . . .
> (I, i, 377 - 381)

It is not my intention to show that Byron fully explored the knotty problem of free will and omnipotence, but this much seems clear: Cain's rationality and critical attitude make moral choice more difficult for him than those who follow absolutes like love or unquestioning faith in God's rightness. Cain's rationality leads him to questions which he cannot answer; even though he trusts his rationality over unthinking acceptance, it doesn't clarify decisions but makes them more complicated.

> Cain. If he [Cain] be good,

> Strike him, or spare him, as thou wilt! since all
> Rests upon thee; and good and evil seem
> To have no power themselves, save in thy will;
> And whether that be good or ill I know not,
> Not being omnipotent, not fit to judge
> Omnipotence, but merely to endure
> Its mandate; which thus far I have endured.
> (III, i, 272 - 279)

Cain states that he has endured the mandates of God "thus far", implying that he is now going to seize control of his fate. However, all he manages to do is to indulge in a moment of uncontrolled emotion which, no doubt, participates in God's greater plan. Byron's presentation of rationality, of the value of Cain's refusal to submit to the greater authority of society's beliefs, is devastatingly ambivalent. Byron's Cain is honoured as a rebel of fierce self-mastery and forgiven as a sinner who lost control in an attempt to be intellectually honest. However, like all the men we have seen who followed the impulse to explore the fullest range of critical thought, Cain above all is an individual who suffers from, and for, his critical rationality.

"The Prisoner of Chillon"

Like Cain, "The Prisoner of Chillon" pits one individual against the whole force of society. However, instead of showing its protagonist withstanding society's influence no matter how ambivalent the victory, "The Prisoner of Chillon" shows him being changed by his prison experience. The prisoner is jailed because he believes in freedom, but he eventually comes to reject this belief. The plot of the poem is thus the prisoner's changing perception of himself when placed

away from society. Byron's protagonist becomes not only a prisoner of society, but of his own view of himself -- not only is escape never suggested as being possible in the poem, the prisoner comes to lose his ideals: they are shown as being conditional on circumstances. The effect of the prisoner's self-examination is to make him reject those ideals, as well as reject the existence that holds such ideals as absolutes. Significantly, the prisoner is unnamed in the poem (although, of course, he is mentioned in the notes to the poem), for he comes to represent every man, and his imprisonment demonstrates the limitations of all men. As Andrew Rutherford says: ". . . his [the prisoner's] thoughts and life were narrowed to the dungeon's scope and he had no idea of escape, for after his experience there the whole earth would only be a wider prison to him."[27] The final message of the poem shows Byron viewing a heroic character in terms of the conditional nature of heroism and recognizing that ideals taken out of society seem unreal -- the prisoner needs some kind of context in order to be heroic. This knowledge of the critical individual's reliance on society points out again the dilemma of the disaffected individual's need for society despite his contempt. Not only does the prisoner need society to be happy, he needs it to make his ideals have meaning.

The first point to be made about the form of "The Prisoner of Chillon" is Byron's use of prison as the setting and dominating image of the poem. The prisoner is a man who

has been in jail for decades -- away from social cant and illusion his remarks have the weight of an overwhelming experience. Yet his view of man is not, as the reader might expect, that man can transcend his environment, but rather that man is determined by his surroundings. In this way social laws appear artificial, but those ideals for holding which society jailed the prisoner also seem artificial. The prisoner thus represents for Byron the outer edge of existence; the prisoners exist away from society but still feel and articulate its effects. A similar use of imprisonment as a dominant image with, however, a different message can be seen in William Godwin's Caleb Williams. The comparison of these two works is helpful for understanding Byron's use of the theme of imprisonment because both view prisons as a useful device for conveying man's essential nature, despite the fact that they have different views of that nature.

In Godwin's novel Caleb Williams is imprisoned unfairly. For Godwin jail represents society, and the injustice of being jailed mirrors the imprisoning effect of social existence. In the novel Caleb is initially depressed by his jailing, but as time goes on he overcomes his despair and reaches what Godwin considers to be his true potential as a human being:

> I eluded the squalid solitude of my dungeon and wandered in idea through all the varieties of human society . . . . While I was thus employed I reflected with exultation upon the degree in which man is independent of the smiles and frowns of fortune.[28]

Caleb escapes the prison's deleterious effect not only in being

optimistic, but in being able to live imaginatively outside his jail. This imaginative escape foreshadows his eventual physical escape. With his mind free of the imprisoning effect of society Caleb articulates a new view of man:

> Such is a man in himself considered; so simple his nature; so few his wants. How different from the man of artificial society! . . . he [social man] is dependent on a thousand accidents for tranquillity and health, and his body and soul are at the devotion of whoever will satisfy his precious crabbings.[29]

Godwin believes in the possibility of man overcoming society's pernicious effects; Byron, as we have seen, is not as convinced that such a revolt is possible. Rather than overcoming the despair of being in prison, Byron's prisoner becomes changed by his depression. However, it is significant that both protagonists only come to know their natures through living in prison. For both writers imprisonment represents a psychological crisis; as characters speaking to the reader their perceptions have a very powerful credibility. As well, both writers' vision of man is seen enacted through their protagonist's evolution in prison; the prisoners both articulate their author's viewpoint and convey it through their behaviour. The prison places man against a bleak background -- in Byron's case, as I shall show, this bleakness perfectly matches the prisoner's pessimistic assessment of man's nature.

"The Prisoner of Chillon," then can be regarded as a dramatic monologue by a man who remembers his years in prison. The prisoner's confinement represents a consideration of what would happen if a man lost everything that seemed to make life

worthwhile. By being imprisoned, Byron's protagonist loses his brothers, his feeling of being part of society, his love of beauty and his love of freedom. He keeps his faith in God, but this faith retreats from the "real world." Instead of viewing existence as providential he comes to see it as being untouched by God; God exists but has little to do with daily life. Thus the prisoner rejects suicide not because of faith, but because he adapts to his imprisonment. The prisoner learns to accept his minimal life; the prison becomes the entire range of his existence and he grows to be happy in that limited view. When the prisoner finally leaves the prison he demonstrates that he will always be a prisoner of his surroundings, convinced that life has no value transcending daily existence: " . . . even I/Regain'd my freedom with a sigh" (ll. 390 - 391). It can be seen that Byron's use of "voice" and verse form in the poem both help develop the characterization of the prisoner. Byron uses first person because he is aiming at a very personal communication -- the reader is meant to visualize the man speaking and to judge the protagonist not only on what he says but how he says it. The prisoner is thus an old man, whose mind has been shaped by his years in prison. The relatively simple verse form is used here to give an ease of expression to his words which conveys a sense of "inevitability": the prisoner has brooded over his memories so long that they have become part of his mind, and he delivers his experiences much as he would trace the surface of the jail wall with his fingers.

The poem opens with the prisoner describing himself:

> My limbs are bow'd, though not with toil,
> But rusted with a vile repose,
> For they have been a dungeon's spoil,
> And mine has been the fate of those
> To whom the goodly earth and air
> Are bann'd, and barr'd . . . .
>
> (ll. 5 - 10)

The prisoner thus establishes that he has been physically changed by his imprisonment and that he is conscious of the change. The reasons for his imprisonment seem vague: ". . . for my father's faith/I suffer'd chains and courted death" (ll. 11 - 12). The prisoner never indicates what exactly his faith was, nor does he describe his persecuters; his persecution therefore seems general.

Before depicting his brother's death the prisoner comments:

> . . . these eyes,
> Which have not seen the sun so rise
> For years -- I cannot count them o'er,
> I lost their long and heavy score,
> When my last brother droop'd and died,
> And I lay living by his side.
>
> (ll. 42 - 47)

In losing count of the years after his brother's death the prisoner shows that he doesn't live as others do. Time for him has become measured not as a succession of days or sunrises but as a fixed pattern; the prisoner's perceptions have become as changed as his body. He doesn't even see by the light of normal existence, as sunlight seems out of place in his prison: "Dim with a dull imprisoned ray,/A sunbeam which hath lost its way" (ll. 30 - 31). Both brothers represent aspects of humanity which tied the prisoner to mankind. The

first brother to die had a solitary love of the woods:

> He was a hunter of the hills,
> Had follow'd there the deer and wolf;
> To him his dungeon was a gulf,
> And fetter'd feet the worst of ills.
>
> (ll. 103 - 106)

He thus represents a natural, free-ranging response to life which, of course, is part of the Romantic love of freedom. The other brother represents love of fellow man, both in his personal attraction which makes people love him, and in his own love of mankind:

> . . . he was as pure and bright,
> And in his natural spirit gay,
> With tears for nought but others' ills
> And then they flow'd like mountain rills,
> Unless he could assuage the woe
> Which he abhorr'd to view below.
>
> (ll. 86 - 91)

His brothers loved nature and other men, and when they die the prisoner's own love of these values is shaken. Both brothers' deaths seem slow and inevitable and the prisoner is forced to accept their deaths, and the death of the ideals they represent, as a gradual fact; not as sudden accidents which jar the normal life but as elements woven into the pattern of daily existence:

> Oh God! it is a fearful thing
> To see the human soul take wing
> In any shape, in any mood:
> I've seen it rushing forth in blood,
> I've seen it on the breaking ocean
> . . .
> But those were horrors -- this was woe
> Unmix'd with such -- but sure and slow . . . .
>
> (ll. 177 - 185)

The prisoner had loved his brothers as he loved mankind; they represented the values which he could respect in other men:

> The last, the sole, the dearest link
> Between me and the eternal brink,
> Which bound me to my failing race,
> Was broken in this fatal place.
>
> (ll. 215 - 218)

The prisoner's connection with his previous existence, the "dearest link," is severed. He thus falls into a kind of coma, where existence seems stripped of meaning:

> . . . vacancy absorbing space,
> And fixedness without a place;
> There were no stars, no earth, no time,
> No check, no change, no good, no crime . . . .
>
> (ll. 243 - 246)

The prisoner shows himself completely bereft of previous convictions, or even of consciousness. He goes on to recover from this state, but without his ideals.

The prisoner is brought back to life by a bird, which represents his old beliefs: "I sometimes deem'd that it might be/My brother's soul come down to me." However, the prisoner rejects the bird as a symbol both of his previous love for nature and for mankind. He has changed, he no longer feels comfortable with his previous convictions:

> A single cloud on a sunny day,
> While all the rest of heaven is clear,
> A frown upon the atmosphere,
> That hath no business to appear
> When skies are blue, and earth is gay.
>
> (ll. 295 - 299)

Like a cloud out of place in an otherwise clear sky the prisoner feels himself different from nature and other men. In recognizing this change he tries to come to terms with his previous love of nature:

> . . . I was curious to ascend
> To my barr'd windows, and to bend
> Once more, upon the mountains high,
> The quiet of a loving eye.
> I saw them, and they were the same,
> They were not changed like me in frame . . . .
> (ll. 328 - 333)

The way in which the prisoner is changed is simply that he can't believe in ideals which seem irrelevant to his existence in prison. Mountains, like his old ideals, don't change, but he has changed. This knowledge causes the prisoner pain, and he is glad to escape into his prison, knowing that as he does so the prison represents the death of his old self:

> The darkness of my dim abode
> Fell on me as a heavy load;
> It was as is a new-dug grave,
> Closing o'er one we sought to save, --
> And yet my glance, too much opprest,
> Had almost need of such a rest.
> (ll. 360 - 365)

The prisoner has adapted to his prison and even takes pleasure in participating in the "life" of the jail. He lives as the animals do, in daily existence without abstract beliefs:

> With spiders I had friendship made,
> And watch'd them in their sullen trade,
> . . .
> In quiet we had learn'd to dwell;
> My very chains and I grew friends,
> So much a long communion tends
> To make us what we are . . . .
> (ll. 381 - 391)

The prisoner's mind, like his body, has become altered and he no longer believes in the ideals which caused his imprisonment. The importance of the prison's effect on him is suggested by the fact that he can't even tolerate his previous freedom. The prisoner will never escape the limitations of

his mind.

When the prisoner is separated from society he changes. The poem thus affirms that the beliefs one assumes in society are artificial -- not just the beliefs the prisoner fought against, but also the ones he supported. Ideals and beliefs don't have an "essential" nature but rather spring from the conditions of social existence. This being true, the question can legitimately be asked: how does one live in society after recognizing the arbitrary nature of the ideals which give existence meaning? It can be seen from the end of "The Prisoner of Chillon" that the circumstantial nature of belief asserted by the prisoner's rationality disrupts his social existence. He learns that many of the ideals he held were a "sham"; they aren't able to survive his imprisonment and actually need society to make then seem valuable. After seeing that his ideals can't exist outside of society the prisoner is unwilling to live in society -- in accepting the loss of his ideals the prisoner accepts the loss of social existence. The prisoner's disillusionment, which results from his imprisonment, reflects the disturbing power of critical rationality. Rationality can strip social existence of its "illusions," but once so demystified, life in society becomes more difficult. Byron does not make explicit the connection between prisons and the kind of critical rationality I have been considering. However, as the prisoner is unable to live in society so too the reader of "The Prisoner of Chillon" must consider the difficulty of adhering to ideals which are as

conditional as the poem shows them to be.

CHAPTER V

Don Juan Canto I

For Don Juan Canto I, as for all the narrative poems examined thus far, the consideration of what "meaning" the poem conveys involves an assessment of the poem's structural devices. More time has to be spent on assessing Don Juan Canto I's formal properties than Cain or "The Prisoner of Chillon" because in Don Juan Byron uses a more complicated strategy. Unlike the other two poems Don Juan Canto I is a satire, which Holman defines as: "a literary manner which blends a critical attitude with Humour and Wit to the end that human institutions or humanity may be improved."[30] To accomplish the aim of improving society any satire must provide a standard of behaviour, both to show in which direction society should be improved, and to furnish a sharp edge which can be applied to those institutions which the satirist wishes to criticize.In the earlier two poems the standard was set by the protagonists' behaviour; even though the protagonists' actions ended in tragedy Byron showed no honourable alternative in the poems. In Don Juan Canto I however, the standard lies not in the protagonist's behaviour but in the narrator's response to Don Juan's behaviour. As the first lines of the poem imply Byron is dealing with a new kind of hero in Don Juan Canto I, and he conveys his heroic standard in a new way as well:

> I want a hero, an uncommon want,
> When every year and month sends forth a new one,

Till after cloying the gazettes with cant,
The age discovers he is not the true one.
(I, i)

Don Juan Canto I has three main characters: Don Juan, Donna Julia and the narrator. The basic plot of the canto involves the coming of Don Juan into sexual manhood, a state he achieves through his affair with the married Donna Julia. The canto, of course, is concerned with much more than telling a story of young love and cuckolding -- the narrator's function is to provide a standard of cynical, wordly commentary which satirizes all the attempts society might make to view the affair sentimentally. Although there is a tendency to view the narrator and Byron as identical this is actually a mistake. The canto does satirize sentimentality, but it urges much more than cynicism; it calls for a recognition of the tendency of individuals in society to reify institutions and misunderstand natural emotions. The narrator in the canto is the disaffected intellectual we have seen throughout Byron's poems, but instead of railing against the conventions and institutions of society he is now resigned to them, viewing life with a kind of experienced acceptance which laughs at rather than indulges in sentimentality. The narrator's function in the canto goes beyond this role, however -- just as the narrator with his digressions and comments about his digressions undercuts the social response which would sentimentalize Julia and Juan's relationship, so the narrator also, implicitly, undercuts the reader's response to the canto's plot.

Byron is, as T.S. Eliot pointed out,[31] one of the consumate story-tellers in English Literature. Byron forces the reader to like Juan, forces the reader to identify with him and to see in Julia all the sexual possibilities one can imagine in the situation of a twenty-three year old woman married to a man of fifty years. But, while having the reader follow the story and care about its participants, Byron also has the narrator "shock" the reader by uncovering the very narrative devices he used to entrap him. For example, at the very moment Juan and Julia are to consumate their affair, the narrator interrupts with a digression about Plato:

> Oh Plato, Plato, you have paved the way
> With your confounded fantasies to more
> Immoral conduct by the fancied sway
> Your system feigns o'er the countrolless core
> Of human hearts than all the long array
> Of poets and romancers. You're a bore,
> A charlatan, a coxcomb, and have been
> At best no better than a go-between.
>
> (I, 116)

As will be seen, this passage reflects the concern voiced throughout Canto I about the danger of "cant" being hypocritically used to justify any behaviour. However, the passage does more than make this satirical point. Such an interruption, humourous though it is, breaks the spell of the narrative, strains the bounds the "suspension of disbelief" beyond recovery. In other words this digression points out to the reader that Byron is telling a story, that he is manipulating the details of the plot and that Juan and Julia have no existence beyond the confines of Byron's story-telling

skill. The digression at this point in the canto brings the reader up short, and on reflection he has to question whether details have been arranged to make the story engrossing and therefore a kind of lie. The notion that a story is fictional is, of course, obvious, but bringing up this question just when the plot is reaching its climax takes the poem out of the privileged realm of narrative art into the realm of product. Don Juan Canto I is ironic throughout and the final source of irony in the poem comes from the reader's recognition of his own surrender of a critical response to the tale Byron is telling -- of being entranced by the clichéd plot of sexual intrigue. The result is a satire which "satirizes" narrative art and, as well, which doesn't attack society so much as uncover man as a social being, dependent on social conventions including language and literary form. The reader can recognize himself in society and see that his expectations of and involvement in a story are themselves social conventions, the result of the reader having learned to read "conventionally." Cant is not, therefore, an assumed mask which can be discarded at will but an intrinsic part of social behaviour. This recognition of the inevitable "conditioning" involved in social existence keeps the poem from giving any alternate standard of belief other than warning against letting any belief becoming reified to the point where it appears "natural" and "true." To rephrase in terms of the disaffected intellectual seen in previous poems: Don Juan Canto I suggests that the disaffected intellectual will

become frustrated when attacking cant because of his failure to recognize that cant is a necessary part of social existence.

As indicated, Byron's strategy in Don Juan Canto I is to use his story-telling skill to get the reader involved in the tale of the canto and then, through change of context, digressions, ridiculous situations, etc., make the reader recognize that society constantly establishes false assumptions about sexuality, love, youth, innocence, etc. My examination of Canto I's "upsetting" will have two parts: I shall first consider Byron's formal devices of verse form, time setting, foreign settings, and use of incidents from Byron's life; and then I shall show how Byron distorts the narrative form to make a satire. My intention in both sections will be to show how Byron satirizes society and, beyond that, how he "satirizes" the reader's response to the canto.

It can be seen that Byron's use of formal devices in Don Juan Canto I answers technical problems Byron has been addressing through all the poems examined thus far. The initial problem dealt with here concerns his choice of verse form. His use of "ottava rima" verse clearly responds to the requirement first presented in the preface to Childe Harold's Pilgrimage:

> The stanzas of Spenser, according to one of our most successful poets, admits of every variety. Dr. Beattie makes the following observation: -- "Not long ago, I began a poem in the style and stanza of Spenser, in which I propose to give full scope to my inclination, and be either droll

> or pathetic, descriptive or sentimental, tender or satirical, as the humour strikes me; for, if I mistake not, the measure which I have adopted admits equally of all these kinds of composition."

Ottava rima is better suited to the freedom described in the above because, of course, it is relatively simple. As Holman states, it has "a stanza pattern consisting of eight iambic pentameter lines riming abababcc."[32] The versatility such compositional freedom provides Byron he later identifies as one of the key properties of Don Juan:

> . . . I will answer your friend C [ohen], who objects to the quick succession of fun and gravity [in Don Juan], as if in that case the gravity did not (in intention, at least) heighten the fun. His metaphor is, that "we are never scorched and drenched at the same time". Blessings on his experience! Ask him these questions about "scorching and drenching". Did he never play at Cricket, or walk a mile in hot weather? Did he never spill a dish of tea over his testicles in handing the cup to his charmer, to the great shame of his nankeen breeches? Did he never swim in the sea at Noonday with the Sun in his eyes and on his head, which all the foam of the Ocean could not cool?[33]

In order to allow Byron to accomplish his satirical points ottava rima gives Byron a great facility in arranging different contexts and points of view. As well, the compositional freedom in Don Juan Canto I paradoxically also makes the reader more aware of the canto as constructed artifice, because the shifts in it are extreme to the point of being "sloppy"; words sometimes don't quite rhyme and one gets an impression of Byron's not bothering to rewrite the poem: "don't ask me to alter, for I can't: -- I am obstinate and lazy -- and there's the truth."[34] This atmosphere of unconcealed devices makes the reader question poetry, makes

the reader ask where craft ends and truth emerges.

Byron's "uncovering" his technique is also evident in his use of his time framework. In the preface to Sardanapalus Byron shows his concern with the use of time in his comments about the "unities":

> The Author has in one instance attempted to preserve, and in the other to approach, the "unities"; conceiving that with any very distant departure from them, there may be poetry, but there can be no drama.

The unity of time, which is the unity which Byron observes in Sardanapalus, refers to the attempt of the author to have the action of the play occur within a twenty-hour period, or slightly over this period. The reason for this unity of time is given by John Dryden, a writer Byron much admired:

> "The unity of Time they [the Ancients] comprehend in twenty-four hours, the compass of a Natural Day, or as near as it can be contrived; and the reason of it is obvious to every one, that the time of the feigned action, or fable of the Play, should be proportioned as near as can be to the duration of that time in which it is represented . . . ."[35]

In Don Juan Canto I, of course, Byron is not concerned with the unity of time as it is not a drama. However, these theoretical deliberations show that Byron is conscious of the implications of manipulating the time framework of his poems -- of the significance of concentrating all the action of a work into a period of time which corresponds to the reader's sense of versimilitude. In Canto I Byron's use of time is very plastic, with the narrator giving the history of Don Juan as he sees fit. However, more significant than the poem's time scheme per se is the narrator's digressive

comments about this use of time. In Stanzas 120 and 121 the narrator interrupts the plot with the following comment:

> [I will take] a poetic license,
> Which some irregularity may make
> In the design, and as I have a high sense
> Of Aristotle and the rules, 'tis fit
> To beg his pardon when I err a bit.
>
> This license is to hope the reader will
> Suppose from June the sixth (the fatal day,
> Without whose epoch my poetic skill
> For want of facts would all be thrown away),
> But keeping Julia and Don Juan still
> In sight, that several months have passed. We'll say
> 'Twas in November, but I'm not so sure
> About the day; the era's more obscure.

The effect of this digression is to make the reader recognize that the story does not unfold as "it happened" but as Byron arranged it. Readers, of course, unconsciously allow authors to manipulate events and the time in which they occur, but Byron here makes the reader recognize this allowance. Byron brings to the reader's attention the nature of poetic license and the fact that readers have to acquiesce in the author's intentions for such license to be taken.

Another technical device seen in earlier poems and in Don Juan Canto I is Byron's use of exotic lands as a setting for the narrative. In Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Cantos I and III, setting the action in overseas has two purposes: it distances the protagonist from society thus allowing him to "see" that society more clearly, and in travelling in foreign lands the protagonist is brought into contact with

significant places in his culture's history. Byron's use of Spain as setting for Don Juan Canto I is different, however, in that he uses the English cliché of Spain as a "hot" land with inhabitants much more passionate than the citizens of the "cold" land of England:

> 'Tis a sad thing, I cannot choose but say,
> And all the fault of that indecent sun,
> Who cannot leave alone our helpless clay,
> But will keep baking, broiling, burning on,
> That howsoever people fast and pray
> The flesh is frail, and so the soul undone.
> What men call gallantry, and gods adultery
> Is much more common where the climate's sultry.
> (I, 63)

In the above lines Byron mocks the idea that behavior is more emotional or uncontrolled because of a country's proximity to the sun. As well, Byron's ironic assertion that adultery can be blamed on climate implies that to view social inhibition on sexuality as being "natural" is also absurd. The passage suggests, in other words, that although conduct is controlled by social mores, man's controlled behavior does not correspond to his nature but is rather based on arbitrary conventions.

In considering this use of a foreign culture to comment upon "home" society it is helpful to recall Stendhal's contrast, in La Chartreuse de Parme, of the "hot-blooded" passions of Italy to the "frigid" logic of France. In his forward to the novel Stendhal states:

> I am publishing this tale without making any alterations to the manuscript of 1830, a course which may have two drawbacks.
> The first affects the reader: the characters, being

> Italian, may possibly interest him less, since hearts in that country differ somewhat from hearts in France. The Italians are a sincere and simple-hearted people who, without any notion of taking or giving offence, say exactly what they think. They are only vain by fits and starts, and then vanity becomes a passion . . . . What would be the use of endowing them with the high morality and pleasing graces of French characters, who love money above all things, and seldom sin from motives of love or hatred? The Italians in this tale are almost the opposite.[36]

The "description" of the Italian and French peoples establishes the dangers of oversimplifying the differences between societies. The Italian people may appear to be different from the French, but the difference is only social, not psychological, as all individuals are capable of sinning for love or money. Stendhal and Byron both show that the characterization of any race as being dominated by just one quality is dangerously simplistic as it only accounts for the social surface, not for the human "nature" underlying this surface.

The use of foreign settings by Byron has an added significance when one realizes that by the time Byron wrote Don Juan Canto I he had been forced to leave England and live on the continent. The question of the reader's response to incidents and situations in his poems which bear a resemblance to Byron's life is a question which occurs throughout his poetical career. As I stated, despite his protestations to the contrary, some of his poems don't seem to have had their biographical material worked to the level of autonomous art and thus the reader is allowed to ignore the message Byron is trying to convey. This problem of biographical reference is brought up in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto III

when, as I indicated, Byron presents the poem as a work dealing with his life:

> Is thy face like thy mother's, my fair child
> Ada! sole daughter of my house and heart?
> When last I saw thy young blue eyes they smiled,
> And then we parted, -- not as now we part,
> But with a hope.

In Don Juan Canto I Byron also makes references to situations in his own life, but his purpose here is different than in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto III, as by tantalizing the reader with such references he creates another source of irony in the poem -- he makes the reader question the extent to which the poem mirrors Byron's own life and the extent to which it is fictional art. Following is a comment referring to Byron's reputation as a Regency rake:

> Oh pleasure, you're indeed a pleasant thing,
> Although one must be damned for you no doubt.
> I make a resolution every spring
> Of reformation, ere the year run out,
> But somehow this my vestal vow takes wing;
> Yet still I trust it may be kept throughout.
> I'm very sorry, very much ashamed,
> And mean next year to be quite reclaimed.
> (I, 119)

The above stanza is part of a digression appearing immediately after Juan and Julia's consumation scene has been described. The digression encourages the reader to identify the narrator with Byron -- to be reminded of Byron's famous sexual profligacy. In this way Byron uses English society's image of him as a prurient poet and the above lines can thus be taken as representing acceptance, if not actual urging, of hedonism. However, by placing this autobiographical comment after the somewhat critical description of how Julia

has rationalized her infidelity through her religious beliefs, Byron forces the reader to recognize that Byron does not completely agree with the narrator's relaxed attitude towards the distortion of religious beliefs: "somehow this my vestal vow takes wing." The reader is thus made to see the fallacy in identifying the narrator with Byron. This fallacy is shown more clearly when the reader considers the narrator's satirical comments about Donna Inez, a woman whom Byron denied represented Lady Byron,[37] but yet who carries some very striking similarities:

> Perfect she [Donna Inez] was, but as perfection is
> Insipid in this naughty world of ours
> Where our first parents never learned to kiss
> Till they were exiled from their earlier bowers,
> Where all was peace and innocence and bliss
> (I wonder how they got through the twelve hours).
> Don Jóse, like a lineal son of Eve,
> When plucking various fruit without her leave.
> (I, 18)

The narrator here is describing the likely result when a woman of very strong morality is married to a man of lesser virtue. Such a satirical description could well be applied by a knowing reader to the relationship of Lord Byron and his Lady. However, at other times Byron stated that Lady Byron was not to blame for the failure in their marriage:

> Neither in word or deed nor (as far as thought can be dived into) thought, can I bring to my recollection a fault on her part, or hardly even a failing. She has never appeared to me as one of the most amiable of human beings, and nearer to perfection than I had conceived could belong to humanity in its present state of existence.[38]

The significance of these contrary accounts of marriage between two different kinds of people is not to suggest that

Byron believed either that his wife's "perfection" caused their marital difficulties or that they occurred in spite of her virtues. The point is rather that Byron is capable of holding a complex, even contradictory attitude towards marriage, as towards society in general. To insist that the satirical attitudes in Don Juan Canto I represent exactly Byron's own opinions is to reduce the complexity of his response to a simplistic level, because in Canto I Byron is trying to make the reader see the constant danger of reifying beliefs. By treating the standard represented by the narrator as Byron's ideal, and by treating the poem as biography the reader commits precisely the fault Byron is attacking.

The consideration of the changed use of personal experience in Don Juan Canto I leads to an examination of his changed use of characters in the poem. In Canto I, as indicated, the narrative itself is not the dominant formal element as the narrator introduces a standard of behavior which judges the protagonist's actions. The reader participates in this judging of the characters' behaviour and is thus distanced from the narrative; Byron conveys his "message" not primarily through his characters' actions but through the narrator's comments about those actions. This is not to say that the characters are poorly drawn, or that they exist as caricatures. However, although the reader can appreciate Julia and Juan as distinct individuals, they are more rewardingly viewed as

representing a cultural viewpoint that the narrator will comment about rather than as individuals acting as autonomous beings. This change in Byron's use of his characters can be seen by comparing them to the protagonists in his earlier poems. In Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Cantos I and III, Cain and "The Prisoner of Chillon," the protagonists have self-contradictory characters and the plots of the poems are designed to show that their contradictory behavior issues from the paradoxical nature of their characters. In Don Juan Canto I the characters function more as representations of social beliefs. The reader is not meant to empathize with the characters as much as in earlier poems, but rather to perceive them as demonstrating beliefs which the narrator can reveal as being false or, at best, arbitrary. There are three characters which function together in this way: the narrator, Donna Julia and Don Juan.

In considering the character of the narrator in Don Juan Canto I, one is immediately struck by the amount of humour the narrator has -- humour being a quality which is almost completely absent from the poems considered previously. It can be seen from the humourous tone of the canto that the narrator is a worldly-wise individual who sees society's faults yet rather than being indignant can appreciate the ridiculous aspect of the things he sees. Perhaps the most succinct description of the tone the narrator affects is found in one of Byron's defences of Don Juan:

> As to "Don Juan", confess, confess -- you dog and be candid -- that it is the sublime of that there kind of writing -- it may be bawdy but is it not good English? It may be profligate but is it not life, is it not the thing? Could any man have written it who has not lived in the world? -- and (t)ooled in a post-chaise? . . . I have such projects for the Don but the Cant is so much stronger than the (Cunt) nowadays, that the benefit of experience in a man who had well weighed the worth of both monosyllables must be lost to despairing posterity.[39]

The impression of the author of Don Juan conveyed in the above comment suggests a man of the world speaking to other experienced men. Again, as noted, the persona of the poet suggested here is not completely identifiable with Byron. Although there is throughout the poem the cynical appreciation of sexuality suggested in the above, Byron also defends the poem on the grounds of its morality, a defence which separates the narrator from Byron the artist who wrote Don Juan:

> . . . Don Juan will be known by and bye, for what it is intended, -- a Satire on abuses on the present states of Society, and not an eulogy of vice . . . .[40]

The canto thus establishes a narrator who has spent his time in society and who has seen events similar to those he describes. The result of the narrator's years of society life is that he feels beyond the illusions of love and youthful enthusiasm; he respects the power of the emotions which seize Julia and Juan, but he knows from his worldly-wise perspective that love is more a matter of instincts than ideals:

> No more -- no more -- oh never more, my heart,
> Canst thou be my sole world, my universe!
> Once all in all, but now a thing apart,
> Thou canst not be my blessing or my curse.
> The illusion's gone forever, and thou art
> Insensible, I trust, but none the worse,

> And in thy stead I've got a deal of judgement,
> Though heaven knows how it ever found a lodgement.
> (I, 215)

The result of the narrator's experience is, as the above lines state, that he has gained judgement. He describes Julia and Juan's feelings ironically because he is always aware of the reality of man's sexual "nature" lying beyond the artificial way society wishes to view social relationships:

> Even innocence itself has many a wile
> And will not dare to trust itself with truth,
> And love is taught hypocrisy from youth.
> (I, 72)

The narrator thus accepts physicality and sees through the social "games" which both cover up sexuality and can be manipulated to allow its consumation.

There are three characteristics about Julia which Byron uses to have the narrator satirize society: she is pretty, considers herself respectable, and is a twenty-three-year old married to a fifty-year old. As will be seen in the discussion of the narrative, the plot of Don Juan Canto I exploits all the potential the reader can find in these characteristics. This catalogue of features is precisely given by Byron in the following line: "she/Was married, charming, chaste, and twenty-three" (I, 59). In this description Byron puts the physical fact of her age after three adjectives representing her appearance, and thus implicitly questions society's belief that a woman's nature is changed by being married. The placing of her age at the

end of the line shows that the desires natural to a twenty-three-year old remain despite the apparent conventional chasteness of the married state. This suggestion of "natural" appetites lying beneath an artificial "civilized" surface is further conveyed in the following comment:

> Her eye (I'm very fond of handsome eyes)
> Was large and dark....there would arise
> A something in them which was not desire,
> But would have been, perhaps, but for the soul
> Which struggled through and chastened down the whole.
> (I, 60)

In the above lines religious and social inhibition seem to be waging a battle to control the physical desire which she feels. Julia represents a woman who feels sexual appetites, but is bound by the fact that she is married and feels self-respect as a "chaste" woman. In order for Julia to gratify her desire it is necessary for her to maintain her good social appearance. This hypocrisy or social "rationalization" will be seen to be the dominant factor in the plot of Don Juan's introduction to sexuality.

Julia has the controlling role in her and Juan's relationship because, very simply, Juan doesn't have the experience to know how to satisfy his desires:

> The hand which still held Juan's, by degrees
> Gently but palpably confirmed its grasp,
> As if it said, "Detain me, if you please."
> . . .
> I cannot know what Juan thought of this,
> But what he did is much what you would do.
> His young lip thanked it with a grateful kiss
> And then abashed at its own joy, withdrew
> In deep despair, lest he had done amiss.
> Love is so very timid when 'tis new.
> (I, 111 - 112)

Juan is young and has strong feelings -- all he needs is a knowledgeable hand to guide him. In this way Byron satirizes the cliché of the male dominating sexual affairs, which of course is the impression conveyed by the "Don Juan" legend. However, Juan's character is also used to suggest that sexual liaisons are not the result of machiavellian individuals seducing innocents, but rather of men and women trying to satisfy honest desires which are unable to find expression in unnatural social roles. Juan is not controlled by socially induced mores but acts as a somewhat passive participant in the affair, thus just obeying his instincts. Juan's youthful eagerness, as will be seen, is part of Byron's satirical point about society's view of vice; once having appreciated the ingenuous quality of Juan's feelings it is difficult to regard him as a sinner, despite the fact that he is involved in an illicit relationship.

Having considered these formal elements, I will now examine the plot of Don Juan Canto I. The story of Juan's initiation into the world of adult sexuality is a subject calculated to spark the reader's interest, and it is a story Byron tells skilfully. Beyond demonstrating Byron's narrative abilities, however, the seduction of Juan can be described as a demonstration of the relationship between social convention and "natural" human impulse. As we have seen from Byron's naturalistic, cynical and practical characterization of Julia and Juan, they are both ready and willing to be involved in an affair. The plot shows this emotional potential

being consumated as physical love.

Byron begins his examination of their relationship with a recapitulation which stresses the impulses dormant in both:

> Juan she saw and as a pretty child,
> Caressed him often. Such a thing might be
> Quite innocently done and harmless styled
> When she had twenty years, and thirteen he;
> But I am not so sure I would have smiled
> When he was sixteen, Julia twenty-three.
> These few short years make wondrous alterations,
> Particularly amongst sunburnt nations.
>
> (I, 69)

Their association, to one as knowing as the narrator, is no longer innocent. Julia and Juan's behavior from this time onwards exhibits two levels of meaning: on the surface they pretend to be cold, but under that Julia fires emotion in Juan:

> Yet Julia's very coldness still was kind,
> And tremulously gentle her small hand
> Withdrew itself from his, but left behind
> A little pressure...n'er magician's wand
> Wrought change with all Armida's fairy art
> Like what this light touch left on Juan's heart.
>
> (I, 71)

The narrator is aware that love can be conveyed by the very signals which would seem to hide it or which would, to the onlooker, suggest that it didn't exist. In this way the communication means of society are used in a completely different way than society expects:

> But passion most dissembles yet betrays
> Even by its darkness; as the blackest sky
> Foretells the heaviest tempest, it displays
> Its workings through the vainly guarded eye,
> And in whatever aspect it arrays
> Itself, 'tis still the same hypocrisy.
>
> (I, 73)

The narrator's use of the word "hypocrisy" is curious here, because it implies that he is making a judgement about a situation which he has uncritically accepted to this point. However, the term indicates the kind of psychological process Julia is going through. As shown, Juan is a young, inexperienced man who will love Julia if guided. It is therefore up to Julia to initiate the affair. Byron shows the change Julia undergoes in order to manoeuvre Juan into the affair. The key in this process is that Julia considers herself to be as religious and honourable as most people in society:

> And then there are such things as love divine,
> Bright and immaculate, unmixed and pure,
> Such as the angels think so very fine,
> And matrons who would be no less secure,
> Platonic, perfect, "just such love as mine".
> Thus Julia said and thought so, to be sure.
> And so I'd have her think, were I the man
> On whom her reveries celestian ran.
>
> (I, 79)

In the above lines Julia uses the social conventions of "love" to justify her adultery. She is purposely confusing religious love with physical love to rationalize her sin -- again showing acts being justified by ideals that actually represent something quite different. Julia simply doesn't consider herself a sinner; as the narrator points out such rationalization is common in society:

> Her breast was peaceable;
> A quiet conscience makes one so serene.
> Christians have burnt each other, quite persuaded
> That all the apostles would have done as they did.
>
> (I, 83)

After this comment Julia is shown imagining what would happen to her and Juan if her husband were to die:

Never could she survive that common loss.
But just suppose that moment should betide
. . .
Juan being then grown up to a man's estate
Would fully suit a widow of condition.
(I, 84 - 85)

So, even though Julia doesn't admit that she is trying to seduce Juan, she manages to consider what would happen if somehow she was no longer married. This is the most extreme demonstration of how a chaste woman can plan an affair and still respect herself. Julia is as moral as most people, and the use of the term "hypocrisy" by the narrator to describe the change she undergoes is not an indictment, but a description of a process which is both easy and widespread.

After dealing with Julia, the narrator abruptly shifts to consider Juan's emotions: "So much for Julia; now we'll turn to Juan" (I, 86). The next eleven stanzas are thus devoted to showing Juan's adolescent inability to deal with his longings, but at the same time Byron parodies certain poets whom he opposes:

He thought about himself and the whole earth,
Of man the wonderful and of the stars
And how the deuce they ever could have birth
. . .
'Twas strange that one so young should thus concern
His brain about the action of the sky.
If you think 'twas philosophy that this did,
I can't help thinking puberty assisted
. . .
Thus would he while his lonely hours away
Dissatisfied, nor knowing what he wanted.
Nor glowing reverie nor poet's lay
Could yield his spirit that for which it panted,
A bosom whereon he his head might lay
And hear the heart beat with the love it granted,
With several other things, which I forget
Or which at least I need not mention yet.
(I, 92 - 96)

The above lines show Juan turning to poetry and meditation

to understand his plight -- two resources Byron mistrusts. The lines also, though, attack those poets, such as John Keats, whom Byron thought were writing from imagination rather than lived experience. As Byron says about Keats in a letter:

> [he] appears to me what I have already said: such writing is a sort of mental masturbation - f-gg-g his Imagination. I don't mean he is indecent, but viciously soliciting his own ideas into a state, which is neither poetry nor any thing else but a Bedlam vision produced by raw pork and opium . . . .[41]

The above comments suggest that Byron wished Keats, like Juan, to find a different outlet for his feelings than "reverie" and poetry. Beyond this initial concern, however, Byron is making another critical point about those poets whom he dislikes. In the poetry of Coleridge or Hunt or anyone with a "system", Byron feels there is the danger of viewing life in terms of an ideal rather than reality. In other words, Byron fears that a reader or poet can make a poetic system into cant in the same way that Julia makes her religious beliefs into cant:

> When he (Hunt) was writing his Rimini, I was not the last to discover its beauties, long before it was published. Even then I remonstrated against its vulgarisms; which are the more extraordinary, because the author is any thing but a vulgar man. Mr. Hunt's answer was, that he wrote them upon principle; they made "part of his system"!! I then said no more. When a man talks of his system, it is like a woman's talking of her virtue. I let them talk on . . . .[42]

In these statements Byron blames Hunt's "vulgarisms" on his system. Clearly Byron feels that any attempt to subvert man's common sense by an arbitrary belief is dangerous,

because it justifies acts which wouldn't have been performed without a system or belief to rationalize them. Juan, fortunately, has Julia to direct his energy into sexually-related activities rather than poetical ones. However, left to his own devices, Juan would, Byron suggests, have been misled about his emotions by the poetry he reads.

Having established Julia's and Juan's desires and the fact that they are able to quell their social inhibitions in order to obtain them, Byron proceeds with the narrative. The actual consumation is conducted in a way that brings out the qualities of all three characters: Julia initiates the action, but in a hesitant way, Juan is passive and the narrator is ironic:

> And Julia sate with Juan, half embraced
> And half retiring from the glowing arm,
> Which trembled like the bosom where 'twas placed.
> Yet still she must have thought there was no harm
> Or else 'twere easy to withdraw her waist
> . . .
> And Julia's voice was lost, except in sighs,
> Until too late for useful conversation.
> The tears were gushing from her gentle eyes
> . . .
> Not that remorse did not oppose temptation;
> A little still she strove and much repented,
> And whispering, "I will n'er consent" -- consented.
>
> (I, 115 - 117)

Throughout the narrator's depiction of the scene Juan is never mentioned; Julia is the one who is sighing and consenting, yet Juan is never shown forcing the consent. Yet again, although Julia ostensibly has the secondary position in the relationship, she actually controls it. Right to the end Julia clings to her image of herself as a good woman, and right to the end this image doesn't interfere with her

infidelity but helps it along.

At this point in the canto Byron has the narrator indulge in a series of digressions. His musings are prefaced by his noting that he will return to the story of Julia and Juan in about five months -- having bought this narrative time the narrator embarks on a long meditation which, on the surface, seems to be on two contradictory subjects. The first concern of his digression, from stanzas 122 to 127, is "pleasure." The narrator considers those things which are sweet, both sentimental enjoyments:

> . . . sweet the hum
> Of bees, the voice of girls, the song of birds,
> The lisp of children and their earliest words . . .
> (I, 123)

as well as less "nice" pleasures:

> Sweet to the miser are his glittering heaps.
> Sweet to the father is his first-born's birth.
> Sweet revenge, especially to women,
> Pillage to soldiers, prize money to seamen.
> (I, 124)

But, sweeter than all these satisfactions is first love which, as the narrator says, haunts us as a pleasure which can never be equalled: "life yields nothing further to recall/ Worthy of this ambrosial sin . . ." (I, 127). The second concern of the meditation amounts to a survey of civilization as the narrator finds it around him. The narrator feels that civilization's progress has brought as many bad inventions to man as beneficial ones. Although a cure for small pox has been found, man has increased syphilis; although Sir Humphrey

Davy has made mining safer and man is travelling to the pole, men are also killing other men at Waterloo. The culmination of this digression comes in the following lines:

> Man's a phenomenon, one knows not what,
> And wonderful beyond all wondrous measure.
> 'Tis pity though in this sublime world that
> Pleasure's a sin and sometimes sin's a pleasure
> Few mortals know what end they would be at,
> But whether glory, power or love or treasure,
> The path is through perplexing ways, and when
> The goal is gained, we die you know -- and then?
>
> What then? I do not know, no more do you,
> And so good night.
>
> (I, 133 - 134)

The second concern thus represents an attempt to understand the meaning of existence -- and concludes that the behavior of individuals in society seems meaningless. Given this conviction of the essential absurdity of man's existence, the initial concern of the meditation becomes relevant: if young love such as Juan experiences will dominate the rest of his life why consider love wrong? Since it appears to the narrator that the only "truth" man knows is the power of his emotions it seems foolish to view pleasure as sinful. The above stanza pleads for the acceptance of honest sexual love; not because it transcends society in any idealistic way (such as, for example, the love of Romeo and Juliet may be said to do) but simply because it is the most pleasurable experience man can know. In a society of uncertain good, as the narrator paints it, this seems a worthwhile justification -- certainly more worthwhile than justifying behavior on the grounds of false religion.

After delivering these insights the narrator returns to the poem's plot. Having shown Julia and Juan as adulterous lovers, the denouement of their romance remains to be described. This, of course, is one of the expectations the reader has; in stories of cuckolding it is inevitable that the husband discovers the guilty parties. Byron fulfills this narrative convention in a particularly humourous way; Alphonso, Julia's husband, bursts in and after searching can't find Juan:

> He [Juan] had been hid -- I don't pretend to say
> How nor can I indeed describe the where.
> Young, slender, and packed easily, he lay
> No doubt in little compass, round or square.
> (I, 166)

Besides tastefully finishing the job of bearding Alphonso, the narrator's presentation of the scene depicts Julia berating her husband:

> Who is the man you search for? How d'ye call
> Him? What's his lineage? Let him but be shown.
> I hope he's young and handsome. Is he tall?
> Tell me, and be assured that since you stain
> My honour thus, it shall not be in vain.
> (I, 154)

These lines allow the reader to laugh at Julia's husband and enjoy his discomforture. However, Byron does not allow the reader to enjoy this contempt for a cuckolded husband for long:

> No sooner was it bolted than -- oh shame,
> Oh sin, oh sorrow, and oh womankind!
> How can you do such things and keep your fame,
> Unless this world and t'other too be blind?
> Nothing so dear as an unfilched good name.
> (I, 165)

Juan emerges when Alphonso leaves; and the narrator shifts

the story of Julia and Juan's love affair from the level of a bawdy tale to a consideration of the nature of innocence. In the above comment, which reaches a conclusion reminiscent of The Rape of the Lock, it is made clear that the quality of goodness depends upon being considered good by society, and that society judges not by reality but by appearances. Alphonso, of course, eventually manages to discover Juan's presence, and in that way Byron has the narrative opportunity to end the relationship of Julia and Juan. However, it is clear that if Alphonso had not discovered Juan then Julia was as good as innocent, in her own eyes as in society's. Yet again Byron does not judge Julia as bad, but brings into question society's judgement of good.

Having finished with Juan's adventures in this, the first of his "scrapes," the narrator provides us with one last digression on the state of poetry in his time. The narrator's musings fit in, I believe, with Byron's earlier questions regarding poetry's relationship with reality seen in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto III. The question may be put in this way: "Is poetry merely a mirror of reality, following after events, or can poetry in some way create reality, create a realization of some ideal?" The answer to this question lies in the value the narrator gives his own style here:

> There's only one slight difference between
> Me and my epic brethren gone before,
> And here the advantage is my own, I ween
> (Not that I have not several merits more,

> But this will more peculiarly be seen).
> They so embellish that 'tis quite a bore
> Their labyrinth of fables to thread through,
> Whereas this story's actually true.
> (I, 202)

The reason the narrator calls the canto "true" is that it deals with events as he perceives them: he does not, he asserts, attempt to fit his poem into any system or hide behind vague ideals which have little to do with actual life. Going beyond this point though, Byron is implying that Canto I is paradoxically the more true because Byron makes the reader recognize that it is only a story, a thing "artificial" in being based on what his readers desire to read:

> . . . whether
> I shall proceed with his adventures is
> Dependent on the public altogether.
> (I, 199)

Byron brings in the concept of fashion, and the competitions between himself and other poets, as he alleges that he has bribed "my grandmother's review -- the British" (I, 209). He thus suggests to the reader that poetry is often read for the wrong reasons. Byron's poem is true and real not because it presents a certain view of life, but because it makes the reader <u>recognize</u> that it is presenting a certain view. The danger in other poems is that one can read the poem for the story, or because it uses a "system," or just because it is modern and is accepted by official literary institutions. Once having accepted a poem for any of these reasons, and having sacrificed one's critical distance, one finds oneself accepting unquestioningly the cant in the poem. In <u>Don Juan</u>

Canto I Byron tells a story as well as any of his contemporaries can and then forces the reader to see that the reader has made generalizations and accepted social conventions which are, when thought about critically, untrue in the sense of being artificial and not "natural."

The narrator finishes his meditations on poetry with a conclusion regarding fame which will suggest the last point I wish to develop regarding Byron's intent in Don Juan Canto I:

> What is the end of fame? 'Tis but to fill
> A certain portion of uncertain paper.
> Some liken it to climbing a hill,
> Whose summit, like all hills, is lost in vapour.
> For this men write, speak, preach, and heroes kill,
> And bards burn what they call their midnight taper,
> To have, when the original is dust,
> A name, a wretched picture, and worse bust.
> (I, 218)

In the above comment the narrator states that fame is a shadowy prize which has little to do with the reality of daily life. Byron's point, however, goes beyond what the narrator says about the uselessness of fame. As was seen in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto III, fame meant to Byron doing some activity which would lift him out of the range of normal social existence, whether it was writing like Rousseau, or conquering like Napoleon. In Don Juan Canto I Byron rejects fame, not only because the judgement of the future is unsure, as the above lines state, but because poetry written to become an eternal monument risks the danger of becoming cant, of losing its relationship with shared social experience. (This is, of course, precisely the point of Byron's attack on

Robert Southey in The Vision of Judgement.) Byron insists, through the formal devices of Don Juan Canto I, as through the comments his narrator utters, that all man can trust is his critical attitude towards social cant institutionalized in one form as pernicious poetry. For Byron to maintain this critical attitude involves not only the isolation of being opposed to society, but it also calls for the sobering recognition that one is fighting a process necessary to social existence. As we have seen from the poems examined previously, the difficulty of maintaining this tension between integrity and the social insistence on reified values involves the disaffected intellectual in a conflict with his contemporaries -- a conflict which inevitably brings the frustration and pain of solitude.

FOOTNOTES

[1]An example of such a critic is Jerome J. McGann, who wrote Fiery Dust: Byron's Poetic Development.

[2]For a clear example of the kind of heroism I am thinking of refer to The Myth of Sisyphus by Albert Camus.

[3]Countess Marguerite of Blessington, Lady Blessington's Conversations of Lord Byron, Ernest J. Lovell ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 172 - 173.

[4]Peter Gunn ed., Byron Selected Prose (Aylesbury, Great Britain: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972), p. 395.

[5]Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (Markham, Ontario: Penguin Books Ltd., 1967), p. 106.

[6]T. G. Steffan, E. Steffan and W. W. Pratt eds. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973).

[7]See The Myth of Sisyphus.

[8]Frederick Page ed., Byron Poetical Works (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 179 - 209.

[9]Page ed., pp. 520 - 545.

[10]Page ed., pp. 336 - 340.

[11]William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard, revised and enlarged by C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1960), p. 358.

[12]I am thinking of the strain of Gothic literature exemplified by such authors as Ann Radcliffe and Charles Maturin.

[13]See Victor Shklovsky's "Art as Technique," Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis eds. and trans., Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 12.

[14]Andrew Rutherford, Byron: A Critical Study (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1962), p. 27.

[15]Holman, p. 467 - 468.

[16]Rutherford, p. 28.

[17]From a comment by Gary Kelly.

[18]It is doubtful if the narrator's comments really show an awareness of overseas nations "foreigness," but nevertheless it is clear that Harold's inability to learn stems from his psychological difficulties rather than his ethnocentricity.

[19]Quoted in Rutherford, p. 28.

[20]It can be noted that Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Cantos I and II had already been published by the time Canto III came out and Byron already had a literary reputation established.

[21]Margaret R. Shaw trans., The Charterhouse of Parma (Markham, Ontario: Penguin Books Canada Ltd., 1958), pp. 43 - 44.

[22]Voltaire, The History of Charles XXI, The Works of Voltaire Edition de la Pacification, Vol. XX - XXI (Akron, Ohio: The Werner Company, 1906), p. 47.

[23]Voltaire, p. 56.

[24]As quoted in Rutherford, p. 3.

[25]"The Structures of Childe Harold III," Studies in Romanticism, 18 (Fall 1979), p. 380.

[26]Sylvan Barnet, Morton Berman, William Burto eds., The Genius of the Later English Theater, Introduction to Cain (U.S.A.: Mentor Books, 1962), p. 188.

[27]Rutherford, p. 72.

[28]William Godwin, Caleb Williams (New York: W.L. Norton & Company Inc., 1977), p. 186.

[29]Godwin, p. 187.

[30]Holman, p. 436.

[31]"Byron," On Poetry and Poets (London: Faber and Faber

Ltd., 1957), p. 196.

[32]Holman, p. 332.

[33]Gunn ed., pp. 309 - 310.

[34]Ibid.

[35]The Works of John Dryden, ed. H.J. Swedenborg Jr., Vol. XVII Prose 1668 - 1691 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 17.

[36]Stendhal.

[37]Gunn ed., p. 339.

[38]Gunn ed., p. 223.

[39]Gunn ed., p. 322.

[40]Gunn ed., p. 489.

[41]Gunn ed., p. 357.

[42]Gunn ed., p. 421.

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